

PART TWO

Eleven.

Kelso Lamont was born on the Kentish Downs on the day his father returned to the front in the spring of 1918, in a house which looked down on the ships as they crept below the cliffs and the cover of the shore batteries, and from which could be heard - especially when there was fog - the thunder of the great guns over in Flanders. The war was still not over. The Germans had just transported fifty two divisions from the the east and Ludendorff was keen for a new offensive. Towards the end of March - on a morning of very dense fog indeed - the Germans attacked on the Somme and over-ran the British machine-gun battalions. In the north of the line German divisions fought their way into an opening between Ypres and Břthune, and for a time it looked as if they might even threaten the Channel ports of Calais and Boulogne. A little to the south, German divisions attacked at Arras and along the line of the Somme river itself, towards Amiens. More divisions came across the Aise and fought their way towards the Marne: bringing the great prize of Paris within immediate reach of the German forces.

On Good Friday, shells from the giant artillery piece Big Bertha even fell into the French capital, at a range of seventy miles. A second offensive followed in May. Fourteen divisions smashed through the Allied line, bringing the Germans to the Marne and fifty-five miles from Paris. Another fifty-two divisions were readied for a third offensive around Rheims: and this attack came in the middle of July. It was the last offensive of the summer, however, and the last offensive of the war.

Three days later the French counter-attacked at Cambrai, sending massed tanks out from the cover of the morning mist. In

early August the British attacked too, with 450 tanks. In mid-September the Americans stormed the St Mihiel salient near Verdun, and over-ran the enemy there in less than 24 hours of savage fighting. A fortnight later the Americans led a renewed offensive in the Argonne.

Throughout it all the German line held, and everywhere on foreign soil: but in the rear, the civilian population was facing imminent starvation as a result of the Allied blockade. Then the Hapsburg (and Ottoman) empires fell like packs of cards and British forces took possession of Damascus and Constantinople. By the morning of the fourth day of November, mutineers in the German navy had taken over the mighty naval base at Kiel: and the Kaiser's Reich was no more than a matter of days from defeat.

In any case, it hardly mattered to the household on the cliffs just up the coast from Dover: for the father was posted missing, and then reported killed in action, in some unsung scouting action at the southern end of the British line. The telegram was delivered on the eleventh of November, by a respectful telegram boy on a bicycle, and before Christmas that year his widow and recent child had taken themselves to the far north, and the care of aunts in a terraced house in Edinburgh not far from the city park known as the Meadows.

By the following spring the mother was dead too, carried off in that winter's epidemic of Spanish influenza: and it was under the tutelage of his grim aunts that the boy Kelso spent his early years. The house - in which a photograph of the boy's father had proud and prominent place - was equally grim. It was, largely, a place to escape from, to the nearby Meadows or - a little further away - the Salisbury Crags, and beyond them again the old volcanic plug of

Arthur's Seat. For years afterwards, Kelso carried dim memories of these boyhood times: mounted police baton-charging striking miners at Tollcross; a grand royal procession in Princes Street; a trip in an omnibus to watch the yachting at Granton; crippled and blinded veterans begging in the streets; a summer holiday in the distant country, somewhere beyond Portobello, with the barren hulk of the Bass Rock out in far the distance; and then some more mounted police and hunger-marchers as the 'twenties drew to a close.

But the grim aunts were canny and inveterate gamblers, and in the great bear market of 1930 they made a killing which was handsome enough to finance a transfer to a detached villa in Grange Road, back-to-back with a private and heavily-walled lunatic asylum, and within easy walking distance of one of the city's better secondary schools: a barracks of a building, this school, in some sort of mock-classical style, with a Union Flag on top, surrounded by cricket and rugby pitches and with a sports pavilion at the far end of the capacious grounds.

Here, the boy Kelso showed an early talent for the unlikely combination of botany and languages, and it was for one or other of these subjects that he was groomed for entry to the city's university, on the other side of the Meadows, in the autumn of 1936. But fate thought otherwise, in the shape of a teacher - who had himself been maimed and gassed in one of the last great offensives in 1918 - with dangerous and radical opinions about war in general, and the developing international order in particular. The focus of this concern was the growing prospect of another war; and more immediately, events in Spain.

There, in July 1936, the army under Franco had risen in rebellion against the chaotic government of the second republic, and

quickly taken control of large areas of the country. After savage street fighting, the rebels were repulsed in Barcelona and Madrid while a coastal strip in the north, from Asturias to the country of the Basques, remained in government hands. In the rebel areas, outrage was almost at once the order of the day. The Foreign Legion was flown into Seville from Morocco, and massacred with knives all they came across in the working-class Triana, which was then bombarded without mercy. Elsewhere in the country the wives and daughters of those massacred often shared that fate, though not before special indignity and violence was heaped on them: while for its part, the Church merely insisted that all those marked for death should first be allowed the chance of Confession.

This rebellion, and the terror which came in its wake, led almost at once to revolutionary upheaval in those parts of the country held by forces loyal to the constitutional, republican, government. And that upheaval in turn led to an equivalent terror in those republican areas, with a huge assault on the forces of the Church and the wealthy classes in general. In Madrid the blue boiler-suits of the revolution were everywhere to be seen; in Barcelona, where 60 churches were burned down, it became dangerous to wear a tie, or clothes judged to be middle-class. And thus by the end of that July, just a matter of weeks after the initial rebellion, the country was divided in two armed camps, ready for fratricidal war.

Foreigners already in the country rushed to join the forces of the republic. Others were quick to begin joining them, with the young English poet Cornford going into action with the anarchist POUM on the Aragon front in August. A month later, the International Brigades were launched: and within days of their

appeal for volunteers becoming known in Edinburgh, Kelso Lamont - only a matter of days from matriculation in the university - announced to his grim aunts that he had been recruited by a Murray, first name unknown, and was going to Spain with the Brigades.

To Kelso's astonishment the aunts thought this a splendid idea, for defeat of the Spanish fascists might prevent another war: and the night prior to his proposed departure they gave the lad enough money to take him to London and Paris, where there was understood to be a formal enrollment office in the rue de Lafayette.

The following morning, therefore, Kelso boarded the Flying Scotsman at Waverley, under the walls of the great North British hotel, and by that afternoon he was drawing into King's Cross. That same evening he got the boat train at Victoria, had a smooth crossing to Calais, and by dawn his train was rolling through the flat and bloody lands of Picardy. Three days later, after lodging in a verminous hotel du quartier in Paris, he left with some hundreds of other volunteers from the Austerlitz station, and travelled via Perpignan and the broad eastern shoulder of the Pyrenees to Barcelona. Two nights were spent there, in an anarchist barracks and former convent, waiting for a troop train to the south.

Nearly all of those who had come with Kelso from Paris were German refugees from Hitler, or French volunteers for the Paris Battalion. Within days, however, they were joined in the convent by other foreigners, who had all been in the early summer fighting at Arag—n and in the Tagus valley. The city was awash with the red and black flags of the anarchists and POUM. The burned and gutted churches of the city were tumbled and their rubble taken away by the lorry-load. In the main thoroughfares loudspeakers broadcast revolutionary songs throughout the day and much of the

night. It was barely more than a week since Kelso had left the villa and lunatic asylum in Grange Road: but already they seemed to be a universe distant.

Then a train was acquired to transport them to the front: but at the last moment the lad from Edinburgh was taken aside by a German of some authority and introduced to two surly Basques. Kelso was told that in their company he would to be taken to the northern front as a liaison translator. A lorry took them to LŽrida, closer to the front, and then they struck north for the mountains. After some days of walking, and over-nighting in the autumn passes, they crossed into French territory, and made their way along the north of rebel-held territory towards the coast. A local fishing-boat in one short trip carried them west, and landed them under cover of darkness at the little fishing harbour of Guetaria. Then a commandeered limousine, which had once been owned by a coal-and iron-master, took them by the coast road to Santander: and later, further west to the borders of Asturias.

For the rest of the winter, Kelso was attached to armed militia units in the mountains of the principality, holding at bay with savage guerrilla tactics the rebel forces that faced them. But by the summer the military situation had taken a turn for the worse. The south-west of Spain had already fallen to the Francoist rebels, or was on the point of doing so. Now, it was to be the turn of the north. In early September the coast was blockaded and ninety battalions were thrown against Asturias from the east, along with 250 aircraft and as many heavy guns. The republican armies had few heavy guns, no aircraft and no anti-aircraft artillery. The Condor Legion flew up the valleys in close formation and at very low altitude, to bomb the defenceless republican forces below. Meanwhile, the

rebel forces slowly increased their grip. After six weeks, it was nearly all over. In the middle of October, Kelso was badly wounded in a savage firefight up in the mountains, near the Puerto de Pájares. As he was taken down the valley, into the heart of the ever-reducing republican territory, the rebels broke through to the east: and resistance all but collapsed. A week later the rebels had seized Gijon and the northern front no longer existed. Nearly 20,000 partisans took to the Leonese mountains, and held out there until the following March, after a hellish winter of cold and hunger, while the wolves howled in packs around them. But Kelso was no longer fit for mountain combat in the depths of a high-altitude winter.

Along with a handful of German volunteers he was smuggled through rebel territory towards the French frontier. The route ran with precision and confidence through the mountains of Cantabria and into the Basque country. In a mountain village somewhere to the west of Durango, they fell foul of enemy forces. For three days they were held without food in the cellars of a country-house. An officer told them calmly that they had been already tried and convicted. They would, he said, be shot when it was convenient; but as foreigners, they had no need to fear torture or other indignity. Then the cellar was needed for the questioning of a fresh batch of captives, and Kelso's party was moved to a gaol somewhere in the near vicinity.

They were still in the mountains, for it was cold at night. Each morning, a group of condemned prisoners was dragged to the courtyard. A priest heard confessions from those who wished to avail themselves of the opportunity. The prisoners were then shot, while the priest blessed the firing squad. Kelso and his batch of volunteers were required to watch these executions.

On their sixth night there, the officer in command of the gaol got extremely drunk: and one of the German volunteers strangled him and relieved him of his uniform. By this stratagem, the volunteers were able to steal a military vehicle and make their escape towards the French border.

The night was still extremely dark, but a moon was rising in the east. They ran into a road-block after some miles of driving, and they shot each of the southern peasant lads who manned it. Immediately afterwards they came over the edge of the escarpment, and the road fell into great swooping curves as they crashed down into the valley below. One of the Germans, an Alsatian and former mountaineer, knew a cross-country route to the border. They drove until it was daylight, and remained in hiding until it was dark again. The next night they drove until they could see the mountains in the near distance, when they abandoned the car. And then they started walking.

Two days later they were over the border and into France, with train tickets for Paris. On the platform at Bordeaux they bought food; the first they had seen for nearly a week. On arrival in Paris, they got extremely drunk in the Pied de Cochon at Les Halles and the next night in the Brasserie Flo - for the Alsatian insisted that they should get drunk in every Alsatian tavern in Paris. But on the third night, Kelso was arrested and deported to Dover. With the last of his money he got to Victoria and then to King's Cross with moments to spare for the Edinburgh train. By the following morning, he was home again. It was the summer of 1938, and the newspapers said that the war in Spain was all over except for the shouting. The Pyrenees were full of desperate columns of refugees

and already people were saying that the communists and the Russians had betrayed the republic.

Kelso's grim aunts were still in Grange Road. They were certain that another European war was on its way. They had even bought a place in the north somewhere, for the times when Durango and Guernica should come to Viewforth and Polwarth and Morningside. They counselled Kelso that he should enrol once more for the university, as they did not think there would be much time for such luxury in the immediate years to come.

So the lad walked over the Meadows to the vicinity of George Square and made arrangements to begin classes the following autumn. He was already two or three years older than the usual undergraduate, and spoke fluent Spanish and German and passable French. Modern languages seemed a redundant subject: so he spent a year - just under a year - enveloped in the mysteries of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, and the curious cluster of languages which went with them. The university and its students seemed very strange after 18 months at the northern front and some terrible months with the partisan forces in the Leonese mountains: but Kelso took to his studies with application and considerable natural aptitude, and quickly attracted the attention of his professors.

In the autumn of 1939, when full-scale war erupted on the continent, he announced that he would volunteer for whichever service might have him. Combat and intelligence work with the Spanish republicans was not, however, a recommendation to the recruiting officers of the Scottish regiments: and in any case his professors were keen that he continue with his studies for at least one more year: and then one after that.

So Kelso stayed at the university for three years. But in the summer of 1941, a matter of days after his graduation, Germany invaded the Soviet Union: and that same evening one of his professors sought him out in one of the many bars that marched in an unruly line from Tollcross, under the Bridges, and onwards in the direction of Holyrood. There was someone Kelso had to meet, the professor said: and they walked to a capacious upper-floor flat off Leith Road - a flat which staggered under the weight of its private collection of volumes in all the languages of the Levant.

The visitor was a serving colonel, a gunner called Jack, who had lost a leg at the Dardanelles, and had known Kelso's father in France and Flanders. He had many questions for the young man.

Did he think he could jump from an aeroplane? In the dark? Over enemy territory? Did he know what opium was? Had he any idea of the value of raw opium in the European wartime market, or its immensely greater value in processed form? Was his German native-speaker standard? Any regional accent, then - the steel-towns of the Ruhr, say? Or even Alsace? Had he used explosives in Spain? Was it correct - as his teachers at the university said - that he could speak the strange, agglutinative Turkish tongue like a native? And read it too, whether in its squat and ugly Romanist face or in its older and ever-so-gracious Arabic script? And - just one more thing. Would he consider going to Turkey - after a period of training, of course - to assist with an intelligence operation planned in association with some of Britain's friends there? Perhaps even, with some of the Germans he had known on the northern front, all those years ago in '38?

The jump-training began almost at once, at a military aerodrome outside Manchester: and when he could jump at night

without much fear, he was flown to somewhere near Glasgow, for onward passage to one of the coastal killing-schools in the Highlands. Kelso and another three recruits were driven north immediately after arrival. There was a torrential rain-storm soon under way. Road-blocks, manned by regular soldiers in streaming capes, detained them three times. No traffic of any kind at all was to be seen. Somewhere, they stopped at an inn and received whisky and hot water in generous measure, beside a hot fire. Then they drove on. At dawn, they came to a beach. On a drying islet, the ruins of a little castle tilted. A heavily-wooded island lay across a narrow sound. A dinghy came ashore from a launch, and took them from the sand. Ten minutes later they were landed on the broken and rocky shore of the island; some way beyond it, an explosives class was under way. A line of very shallow trenches had been dug, each just long enough to contain one adult figure lying very close to the ground. A civilian of military bearing was demonstrating tricks with explosives to a class of trainees. When they were fused and thrown aside, each trainee was ordered to take cover in his trench. The pressure-wave nearly knocked Kelso off his feet on the beach. They had arrived at their killing-school. The island was called Shona, on the western coast of Moidart.

The students were billeted in a ruinous but once-grand country house. In the basement they were taught rapid-fire with small arms by a man who had spent much of his life at the violent end of the Shanghai police force. Then he taught them other ways of killing, with or without arms. Some of the students were Norwegian: silent men, for the most part, who would be at breakfast one morning, and gone for ever the next. Others were Spanish republican refugees; yet more trainees and liaison staff were American. A handful of

young women with perfect German was billeted in a nearby gamekeeper's cottage. They excelled at the silent killing in particular. Then one morning, they had gone. After three weeks, it was time for Kelso to go too.

The parachute-training proved to have been a waste of time, for he was sent to Istanbul via Gibraltar and Cairo. A destroyer picked him up, plucked by picket-boat from a windy and rain-swept Dunoon, on the waters of the Clyde. The vessel had way on her as they came alongside, and by the time Kelso had reached his cabin, the deep insistent note of engines building to full power could be heard. A steward brought food - tinned sausages and mash - and the captain's compliments. There was also a glass of rum, a very large one.

At high speed the ship rushed down the Clyde estuary, in very poor weather and rolling abominably. A convoy of merchantmen was assembling off Arran; or perhaps no more than a group of ships which would shortly steam north to join an Arctic run from their assembly point at Loch Ewe, or Mull, both far away to the north. Aldis lights were flashing from each of the vessels, and strings of flags rushed on the signal halyards. A spotter aircraft circled wearily overhead: for the enemy might always try to slip a submarine through the squadrons of torpedo bombers and the mine-screens to the south.

In the North Channel the destroyer slowed for a time; but soon regained speed. Sometime around dawn the last of the Tuskar light was to be seen, stabbing away into the first of the morning. They turned west and crept close along the Irish coast, into the teeth of a severe gale; but when it failed to moderate, they came beam-on and began to roll in a dangerous fashion. By the following dawn, they

were slowed right down, for fear of damage. A huge and dangerous sea was running, at right angles to an enormous swell. Visibility was down to less than half a mile, on account of the rain. An hour or so later they came across an enemy U-boat lying-to, and intermittently visible in the huge seas. For a moment someone in the tower raised an arm in salute, or despair, or supplication: then they had gone.

Off Finisterre the weather moderated and they put on more speed again though there was still a huge sea from the north-west. And then the mighty, strangely-unsettling bulk of Gibraltar was up ahead, and closing fast: and the equally strange and unlikely mountains on the African coast.

An aircraft was waiting on the runway, a fast medium bomber with empty bays and long-range tanks. It took off at once, and flew straight for a bank of low cloud across the straits. Kelso looked down once: his destroyer was already up to speed and racing back to the Atlantic, a great rooster-tail of broken water at her stern. Then they were into the cloud and there was no more to be seen. The aircrew brought sandwiches and a flask of coffee: but no conversation was possible above the howl of the engines. By the time there was a sign of light in the sky to the east, they were close to Malta. They landed there, refuelled without anyone having to leave the aircraft, and took off again, this time with an escort of six two-man fighters. They flew a dog-leg course, to keep clear of the north African coast: and when the fighters turned back, they were replaced by another squadron of protective aircraft, which escorted them to a gigantic and immensely busy airfield outside Cairo.

Kelso was not allowed to enter the city, or even leave the airbase. For two weeks, he was confined to a corrugated hut at the

far end of the main runway, in the company of three Turks, who came from the east of their country around the headwaters of the Tigris. But they had lived in Istanbul for years, they said; and before that, in Germany. They all spoke extremely good German: they had worked in the Ruhr, they said, before this latest war had started.

Then a suitable vessel came through the canal and they joined her in Alexandria's great harbour. The ship was Turkish-flagged and the property of a non-combatant nation. She was not likely to come under air or surface attack in the eastern Mediterranean. As soon as she had berthed in the capital Kelso and his companions disappeared at once, and went to a back-room den in a back-street slum. There they were met by their friends, who took them to an underground opium-dealing centre on the other side of the narrows. Colonel Jack was already there, to welcome Kelso. It was the autumn of 1941.

In the west the Germans were on the shores of the Atlantic and the English Channel. In the east Hitler's armies were at the gates of Leningrad and Moscow. Hitlerite parachutists were said to be on the Lenin Hills - the old Sparrow Hills - outside the city, and German artillery spotters could see Moscow's glittering domes with their field-glasses in the morning sun. And it was that evening - and for the first time - that Kelso began to understand the nature of the project that was lying ahead of him.

He was to spend two years in the Turkish capital, organising shipments of opium into the heart of Germany: and organising also the payments for these shipments. The European market for illegal opium was an ancient one, after all, and it was not a trade that a war was likely to interrupt in any significant way. The primary routes ran, as they always had, through central Asia, with Turkey as the last

staging-post for onward supply into continental Europe. This opium came, as always, through Bactria and over the top of Persia by the old Silk Road, skirting the northern marches of Arabia and up the Tigris into the mountains of Anatolia: or from old Antioch by sea round to old Constantinople.

Long-established criminal fraternities in Istanbul controlled this final distribution, through small and close-knit emigrant communities scattered across western Europe. Opium, then, was delivered to a key handful of Turks in the Ruhr valley, and handed-over to an existing network of intelligence-gathering officers, who would arrange its transfer to senior German hands in favour of information on the industrial output of the region. And back in Istanbul, meanwhile, Kelso would arrange for appropriate payment to the Turkish middlemen.

This work was undemanding, and it lasted until the autumn of 1943, when he was ordered, at very short notice, to proceed to the Ruhr himself. No explanation was given; but the Turks with whom he had been operating for the best part of two years were to transport him in safety, if at no great speed, to Cologne, by one of their established routes. Then it became clear what had happened. A shipment had gone missing. The Turks demanded payment: it was not their fault. Kelso paid them, without authority. Thereafter the Turks trusted this man. The Turks refused to co-operate in any more shipments unless Kelso was sent to Germany. It was not, in the circumstances, a demand that could be refused.

A freighter collected him at the harbour and calmly made its respectable way into the Black Sea, calling for cargo at Burgas and Varna and Constanta. It then entered the Danube delta and steamed upriver for some days until it came to Dobreta, close to the

Iron Gates. From here, Kelso travelled by rail over the border into Hungary: and outside Budapest, he stayed with a Turkish family until the documentation for the next stage of his journey was prepared. From this point he travelled openly, as a German-speaking and conscription-exempt Turkish national bound for his extended immigrant-family in Essen.

There was nowhere, as yet, any sign of the disasters to come for the third German empire. The trains ran precisely on time and the grand central stations of Vienna and Munich were as imposing as they had always been, and thronged with servicemen arriving home on leave, or departing for the front once more. In Munich, a military band was playing traditional airs with great *Žlan*. The national flag of the crooked spider on its black and white background was proud on every steeple, every flagpole. There were no cripples to be seen, no beggars, no war-wounded; though an immense hospital train, empty and still, was lying at a platform in Stuttgart. A team of painters in prison clothes was re-touching its gay livery when Kelso's train pulled out for the Rhine valley.

After Mannheim, the train slowed to a crawl and there were frequent stoppages as it made way for industrial freight trains and special anti-aircraft trains all headed north. Somewhere south of Cologne it stopped once more, at dusk, at some minor siding in open countryside. The train was jammed with civilian passengers, and soldiers on leave. All those who wished to dismount and stretch their legs were allowed to do so. From time to time, a child began to cry, but it was quickly silenced. There was a great sense of order. Railway police patrolled the track-sides, warning of the importance of black-out regulations, and the penalties for infringement. As it got dark, another child began to scream somewhere towards the head

of the train. Or perhaps it was the same one. This screaming went on for a long time, then stopped dead. Word ran along the train like wind over water. There was another raid on the way. But for a long time there was silence. It got very dark, and then a crescent moon began to rise in the north-east. Sirens could be heard in the distance, more insistent with each moment. Then silver searchlights began to probe the skies. Someone said they were radar controlled. Someone else said the enemy bombers had radar too, now. And might use petrol bombs, like they had at Hamburg. A storm of anti-aircraft fire lit the sky to the north. But no aircraft were to be seen, of course.

And then the bombs began; they could see the explosions somewhere up the valley, twice even the dreadful flash where an aircraft had exploded at twenty thousand feet. Someone said that this was nothing - no more than a toy raid, a diversion of effort for anti-aircraft defences from a really big raid somewhere else. Another bright spot, moving across the sky, showed where a bomber burned but still held its course. Then it slewed to the south, and began to lose height. At a very low altitude, it cruised slowly across their train, heading on southwards. Everyone could hear the engines, very, very loud. The flames were very yellow. Someone said it was the aviation fuel that burned that way. Someone else said they were burning incendiary bombs, designed for residential areas. But nobody was sure.

Forty minutes later, the raid was all over. The anti-aircraft guns went silent, though a dozen searchlights still pointed across the sky. Someone was smoking tobacco close at hand; you could smell the sweet, sharp aroma on the night air. An animal in pain - or was it pleasure? - shrieked somewhere in the woods. Someone

offered Kelso a beaker of chicory coffee. Then a beaker of schapps, to put the taste of the coffee to sleep. People reboarded the train slowly, speaking in very low voices, and tried to find a place to rest. There was no more screaming from the children; they had all gone to sleep. Those who knew about such things said it would be hours before they woke. Or the train moved.

Sometime the following afternoon they drew into a suburban halt on the outskirts of Cologne. There had been a major raid on Essen the previous night and a small diversionary attack on Cologne's rubber plant at Nippes, in the hope that it might draw anti-aircraft artillery and night-fighters away from the night's main target. Rail access to the city centre was denied, though no reason was given. Perhaps the central stations had been smashed again. Everyone was ordered off the train.

Kelso was met on the platform and swiftly taken to a nearby bar: and by that evening had been transferred to an emergency house in working-class Ehrenfeld, off Lenau Platz and just beyond the border of the old inner-city. Two days later, he was moved at night to a ground-floor apartment at Severins, near the Rheinau docks: and there he was to remain for the next fifteen months, until the increasing intensity of the air-raids forced one final move: before the network collapsed and it was time to go underground for good: or at least until American or French or British forces finally liberated the city.

But his first autumn in Cologne was largely untroubled by raids, though the big industrial centres a little to the north came under terrible attack. And with every passing week, the military situation in the east became ever more grave, and the covert reports of gigantic losses of tanks and men and planes ever more insistent.

Ever since the beginning of the year, really, it was clear to those who cared to think for themselves that Germany, but for a miracle of fortune, was finished. In February von Paulus' army had surrendered following the great defeat at Stalingrad; after which gigantic defeat there could only be more and ever-bloodier retreat.

Even in the west, Germany's war was going badly. Whatever the newspapers said, it was clear that the submarine fleet was beginning to take terrible losses which it could not sustain for long. With the fearful bombing raids on the industrial centres, after all, it was impossible to replace these losses.

But Kelso's first winter of 1943-1944 in Cologne was tolerable, though the city was very cold. Fuel was in short supply and food supplies to the civilian population were also coming under growing pressure. Despite the fearsome penalties for defeatist talk, people whispered about military hospitals filled to overflowing, and the loss of entire infantry and tank armies on the eastern front. There were reports, even, of beggars operating in some districts of the city, even of occasional looting, and a sharp increase in prostitution and the incidence of venereal diseases.

At last the spring came and people said that perhaps there was some hope of a renewed offensive in the east. But those who listened to the BBC in secret said that there had been more defeats in the east, and that a gigantic Red offensive was already under way. After that people stopped hoping, stopped expressing any opinion at all, even in private. Now there was more talk of looters shot, prostitutes arrested and army deserters hanged on the spot by the security patrols sent to look for them.

By the late summer of 1944, things had gone from bad to disastrous: the Allies landed at Normandy in June, Rome was lost

at the same time, and Paris was in enemy hands very shortly afterwards, while Brussels and Antwerp fell in September. And far more ominously, the Russian summer offensive - with endless guns and planes and oil and shells to support it - swept through to the Carpathians and the borders of East Prussia by the end of July. Already every able-bodied man had been called to the armed services, and the cities swarmed with foreign slave labourers, waiting to rise against their German masters. In October all remaining German males, from the ages of 16 to 60, were called into the Volkssturm, for one last doomed stand. It was an ominous sign. Things now - wise citizens said, though strictly among themselves - things now could only get worse. How worse, they were shortly to discover.

And throughout it all, the Turks smoothly moved opium into Cologne and Kelso arranged its passage to a senior officer in a division of the Wehrmacht medical corps, who processed it, and who paid for it with extremely secret information on the German order of battle in the west and details of strategic operations planned for the coming winter. After the Normandy landings, this was intelligence of the very highest value: but by the autumn of 1944, it was perfectly clear that the war could not last for ever and that, sooner or later, Germany would have to accept defeat. The question was; how much defeat, and when?

By September, anti-aircraft batteries were being withdrawn wholesale from the defence of cities in the German heartland and rushed to the ever-retreating eastern front in the hope that they might stop, or at least delay, the endless stream of Soviet tanks pouring into eastern Germany.

And then, towards the end of October, Kelso's network collapsed in the space of two days. He never knew what happened to it. Perhaps the senior medical officer was detected and arrested. Perhaps he was moved with an empty hospital train outgoing for the eastern front. Perhaps he was killed in an air raid. Perhaps he had deserted to the approaching Americans. Or perhaps the endless bombing had simply cut his fragile lines of communications for good.

In any case, a police search was imminent against the remaining Turks who operated in the city and they melted at once into the city's huge underworld of criminals, fire-thieves, gangsters, homeless strays, evacuees with horror stories from the eastern front, soldiers on leave or sent home for good without legs or arms or eyes, fire-crippled pensioners not fit for the front, part-time and full-time whores, sleek black-marketeers, military deserters and forced-labourers on the run from the authorities.

By now the city was on the point of final breakdown, for after the summer lull the air-raids had begun again with a vengeance, and American land forces were slowly approaching from the west. Electricity services had failed or were failing. There were no gas supplies, and heating fuels were running very low for the coming winter. Very few parts of the city had running water now, and most of the hospitals had been bombed into oblivion: while after the raids, fires burned for days.

Sometime towards Christmas it became impossible to move to the east of the city, though one bridge still stood near to the cathedral. The Turks moved constantly from one criminal outpost to another, dodging around the fire-bombed ruins. For a time they had a base in the south-west of Cologne, but it was judged too far from the centre, for the tram lines here were smashed beyond immediate

repair and their electrical power cables writhed in the streets. Thereafter, Kelso found himself surviving in a deep bunker, close to the cathedral, which had been commandeered by criminal elements. This was judged a safe location, for the bombers used the twin towers as a marker point, and showed no inclination to destroy them, or their immediate vicinity.

During these raids all broadcast wireless transmissions went off-air, and were replaced by the relentless ticking of a clock: and afterwards, in the morning, huge fires burned, and corpses littered the streets in violent hues of green and blue and orange. In the daylight, giant clouds of smoke and ash drifted across the city, and when the survivors crawled from their hiding places, out into the carnage and chaos, life went on among the pools of molten lead, the desperate work-commandos, the beggars, the fire-fighters, the dressing station lorries, the smashed and gaping sewers, the mobile food-stations, the summary execution squads, the charred-log corpses with an identification tag attached by skewer, the flooded bomb craters, the bodies wrapped in newspapers trundled by hand-cart to some burial ground: and the sellers of wedding rings, of all sizes and all values, by the pocket-full.

For the two middle months of that winter the weather was extremely cold with harsh winds slashing through the ruins: and in February, it began to snow. But by now the American artillery could be heard, coming closer every day: and in March, Cologne fell to the Allies.

For two months, Kelso - who had badly smashed a leg in one narrow escape from a burning bunker - was cared for by the Americans, first at a forward dressing station, then at an operations hospital somewhere in the rear of the line, and finally at a converted

chateau in the Loire valley with a moat and a forest, and with a gracious wing of the building extended on arches across the river. Of course, the Americans wanted to know why he had been in Germany. And of course he told them. Told them about the opium smuggling in exchange for military intelligence. He even told them who his German contacts were, in the military medical corps; or at least told them as much as he could remember. Two Irish-Americans made notes of all this; but they never told Kelso if any of it was useful. It didn't really matter anyway. The war was over.

Quite soon, he was judged fit to return to England, as the Irish-Americans called it, perhaps as a provocation: but of course the surprise Soviet invasion at the end of May made that very impossible. The Americans said they could take him to the United States, for he would be useful there in analysis of post-war Germany. Or what about becoming a broadcaster in neutral Dublin, for instance? Or would he like to go back to Spain, and live in peace for a little time in the mountains? The Americans could easily arrange, after all, a certificate attesting to his death in the ruins of Cologne. And give him an entirely new identity. Spain was the last place anyone would ever expect to find him, after all.

And so, with a little help from the Americans, and this entirely new identity, Kelso returned to the north of Spain that autumn.

And there in a modest timber cabin above the mountain hamlet of Belmonte, he did indeed live in peace and security for the next two years. Until one morning the World Service reported something about church bells and the hunt for the Pollitt plotters, and something about a drug-smuggling ring organised by the Americans from Ireland into the heart of the second Protectorate. A little later, the inn-keeper down in the village had signalled with his

national ensign that there was a message for the stranger up on the hill.

And that same day, Kelso had left his mountains for the dangerous passage back to the Britain of the second Protectorate.