

Crossing the Red Zone

By J. W. Henson

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I had been to the train station in Salzburg, Austria the night before trying to get a Gray Pass to go through the Russian Zone to Vienna. They told me that it would take at least a month to get the pass. I could not wait. Turning, I walked out into the bracing night air. One of the men followed me onto the ramp and said, "If I were interested in going to Vienna, I would board the train and go without a pass." "What would they do with me if they were to catch me without a pass?", I asked. "Nothing! Its been over a month since the Reds have checked for passes. If you were caught they would just turn you around and send you back to Linz, the border crossing.", he said. I did not want to spend my young years in some Siberian coal mine. No one would ever know.

Tuesday morning I was up before daylight, packed and ready to go. It was a cold, dreary day, with a thin mist of rain falling at times. I boarded the train and dropped into a seat next to a young, blond Austrian girl about my age. We chatted a little as the train pulled out of the Salzburg station, and I told her that I was crossing without a pass. The first stop was at the Russian border at Linz. The young girl said that we should exchange seats so the Russian soldiers who came aboard could not see my clothes, and shoes in particular. She also told me to push my wrist watch up under my heavy overcoat so it did not show.

Soon Red soldiers were flooding aboard and I was sure that this was the morning for a pass check, but they entered laughing and took seats. The high pitched, shrill whistle sounded and we were off. The Fraulein and I chatted as we rode through the beautiful hills and past green fields of pasture land. My German was good, but she spoke no English. About half an hour later the electric engine stopped the train before a large open meadow. Russian troops were bivouacked along both side of the tracks. I could see them climbing over hurdles, crawling through mud on their stomachs under the threat from machine gun fire just over their heads. I must admit that the palms of my hands were wet. Another half hour later the train stopped and my companion got off. I was not nearly so brave now as I was with her present.

The Russians paid no attention to me, much to my relief. As the train pulled into Vienna I melted into the crowd, passing Russian soldiers on patrol, and thinking that their eye was on me. Youth do dangerous things. Things they would not do in older age. But it was a lot of excitement and fun!

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