

Defiance - Bielski Bros. From 15

by the leaders of those detachments. While difficult conditions may have prevailed in the early stages, they changed dramatically as the forest people became adept at pillaging. In a report dated December 5, 1943, Tuvia Bielski boasted that his unit had managed to amass huge quantities of provisions: 200 tonnes of potatoes, three tonnes of cabbage, five tonnes of beets, five tonnes of grain, three tonnes of meat, and a tonne of sausage. Zorin's aide-de-camp presents a similar picture:

There was no shortage of food, in fact we even had reserves. On the day we joined up with the Red Army we pulled several hundred submerged sacks of flour from the lake (this is an excellent way of preserving flour over extended periods as the outer layers harden after soaking in water and form a peel which protects the rest of the contents). We even sent food surpluses to Moscow. Once a week a plane would land in a field inside the forest bringing newspapers and propaganda literature, and took away moonshine, lard and sausages of our own making.

Soviet reports confirm the extent of the plundering and its devastating impact on the population in the area surrounding the Naliboki forest: "In the Stolpce and Nieśwież regions only one cow remained for every five to seven farms and one horse for every seven to ten farms." Partisans often stole clothing and household items for which they had no need. Some of the stolen goods, which included furniture and bedding, surfaced in the local markets where they fetched pocket money for the partisans and their forest charges. Soviet archival sources also confirm that banditry among Soviet partisans was widespread:

... a Soviet informer accused Bielski himself of embezzling gold; no serious consequences followed, however. Charges of robbery were also levied at Jewish partisans by their Soviet comrades. According to the report of 28 May 1943, "some groups, among them the Jewish ones, preoccupy themselves not with struggle but with capturing supplies. Some persons in them, who had fled from a camp, carry out banditry (plundering, drunkenness, and rape)."

The complaints about these alleged transgressions sound disingenuous, coming as they do from the Soviet sources. The Soviet-allied guerrillas routinely engaged in plundering peasants. Documents show that partisan activity often amounted to banditry, rape, pillage, and murder. Occasionally individual transgressors were punished. On the whole, however, the leadership of the Soviet irregular forces considered robbery to be a legitimate modus operandi. Since they largely lacked popular support, the Soviet guerrillas raided villages and manors for supplies. As a top Soviet commander put it, "Most partisan units feed, clothe, and arm themselves at the expense of the local population and not by capturing booty in the struggle against fascism. That arouses in the people a feeling of hostility, and they say, 'The Germans take everything away and one must also give something to the partisans.'"

The most voracious raiders were reputedly the Jewish groups, and this too exacerbated conditions. In one case, Soviet partisans had to intervene on behalf of a villager in Kul, near Rubieżewicze, when Zorin's people seized the few remaining supplies this widow had to feed her young children. Other accounts, including Jewish ones, refer specifically to Jewish marauders assaulting villagers, raping women and taunting the local population during raids, thereby provoking violent confrontations.

Anatol Wertheim describes the antics of Semen Zorin, the leader of his Soviet-Jewish unit, who had a habit of descending on a village with a company

of men, pressuring the villagers into giving in marriage a peasant girl he had taken a liking to. After nuptials and celebrations that lasted for several days, Zorin abandoned his new bride. The most candid and damning indictment, however, is that of Yakov Ruvimovich, a Jew who joined up with the Soviet partisans after being sheltered by a Belorussian family for more than a year:

About half of our people were Jews, but what kind of partisans were they? All they did was rob and rape. They liked taking me along with them when they went reconnoitring. "Yasha," they called, "come with us." Since I was a young boy I was afraid and did not breathe a word. They raped whoever they came across. Once I went to our leader, Romanov, and told him what I saw. "You better be quiet, you m.....f.....," he bawled me out. "Can you prove it?" I couldn't because I usually stood watch on the street. They enjoyed taking the wives of [Polish] officers. They all enjoyed that.

It would be remiss to ignore that violent forays such as these not only set the tone for relations with the local population, but also provoked the inevitable response on the part of some of the bolder farmers who were subjected to repeated, and ever more brazen, pillaging. Initially, small groups of assailants would simply be foiled or disarmed and sent on their way. Later, some armed villagers defended their property by shooting at armed marauders. Others reported them to the local authorities, as they were required to do, or sometimes captured the robbers and handed them over. The local authorities, when they chose to intervene, were much more effective in controlling the problem of banditry, but this occurred infrequently, as the success of the Bielski group's operations show.

One day, a few fellows [from the Bielski group] went to a far-off village to get some food. They took a cow, killed it and didn't wrap it tightly enough around the carcass. Dragging on the sled, the cow dripped blood all the way to Zabelowo [Zabelowo] ... I heard shooting. ... With the first shots we had to retreat; we were no match for a well-organized police company.

To be continued in the March issue...**The Home Army and the treatment of marauders****Ball - Got Snow from 2**

corner to another as I moved while dreaming of some warm exotic place.

New England weather can be unpredictable. Once in the summer, after a tornado warning (that's right, a tornado warning...) we sat in the basement, in our pjs, with the same transistor radio and a gallon of lemonade. I believe that before I left the house, I pulled off the wall the watercolor painting that belonged to my great-grandmother. Everything else was replaceable... even the hamsters.

It is somehow comforting to know that London (yes, London!) got its share of real winter this season too. The snow not only paralyzed Heathrow (Tony Blair was late for his lecture at my son's school in Medford, Massachusetts), but caused the major shutdown of pretty much everything... It seemed that the only happy (British) person was Samatha Fox, the 80s popular singer and sex symbol, who enjoyed time in her now renamed "winter" garden. Several young boys showed up and offered to shovel, and who wouldn't?

Here in Massachusetts, some drive around with buckets full of sand while others prefer cat litter. My personal favorite is bird seeds. Last year, I also had (leftover) Christmas tree branches, and I use them for traction when I'm stuck on ice.

I should not complain as this winter weather keeps us Easterners in a good

shape, you know from shoveling, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, ice sculpturing and dog-sledding.

The power shutdown forces children to play outdoors, tubing and tumbling in the snow, until their cheeks are rosy... and our dogs love it too!

Only some of us, gutless, move to Florida for the winter sending stupid postcards with images of sandy beaches and young tanned women with shapely buttocks. Very funny...!

Our men don't lie around on the beach all day drinking margaritas or chasing other women. In the winter season, ice fishing is the favorite pastime of real men! Almost each town that possesses a lake organizes an ice fishing derby. Occasionally, one or two trucks won't make it back to the shore. Pulling out is at the owner's expense. You pay for being stupid. I did not say all our men were smart...

In Ohio, on Lake Erie, 150 men who liked to live dangerously and "on the edge" ignored the warnings and got stuck on drifting ice. Eleven fire departments were called along with the US Coast Guard. Some saved their fish, so they did not come home empty-handed. "Honey, look, I drowned my truck, but I saved our supper!"

The movie theatre is always an option to go to to warm up if the temperature in your house is 55F or below. This time we couldn't even tell the temperature since the new (digital) thermostat was ... off.

"Slumdog Millionaire" was sold out! I guess others had the same idea, so we went to see "The Reader" (<http://thereader-movie.com/>). It turned out to be a brilliant film... two hours of our time and \$19 well spent.

It begins in 1958 in Berlin, when a young boy becomes ill and is helped by a woman with whom he ... starts an affair. The fact that he is 15 and she is 36 is less important. Except that he gains a new experience for which, in exchange, all she wants is... to be read to. The "kid" is beautifully played by German David Kross, and the shooting of some of the scenes had to be delayed until Kross turned 18.

Maybe watching nude actors when the temperature outside is 0F and dogs would rather dehydrate than go out and pee, may not seem like a good idea, but, how about this ... Kate Winslet's hot body will melt any ice.

Ok, the movie is not what you think it is. It actually deals with the so called... German guilt. Here you have a variety of characters, who sometimes don't behave as you expect them to. But that's life. It's not about Germans or Jews. It's about human nature, mysterious, unexplainable and just like New England weather, unpredictable.

The film is based on a novel by Bernhard Schlink titled "Der Vorleser," which, by the way, is mandatory reading in German schools. American students may need to read it too and not only those at the college level. There are many great scenes, and some are quite emotional. One of the best is at the end, and it's between Ralph Finnes and Lena Olin, when a German lawyer, on behalf of a Nazi guard, meets with a wealthy Jewish Holocaust survivor in her Manhattan penthouse. A captivating thought.

Some American critics don't find this movie attractive, some accuse the filmmakers of underplaying the Holocaust.

We are so used to the Holocaust playing a front role, based on one-sided testimonies that when the critics see the Holocaust only in the background, they call it "revisionism."

The critics in US and abroad seem to be united in the typical accusations of the "novel simplifying history and compelling its readers to identify with the perpetrators." To which the author replied: "I've heard that criticism several times, but never from the older

generation, people who have lived through it." That's what I thought...

Coffee flavored water (at the theatre convenience stand), not to be mistaken for real coffee sells for \$3.25 and could not possibly have ruined my movie. Another option was bottled water for ... \$4.

You don't have to wait for the snowstorm to see the film as for some, it may never come.

Too cheap to spend money on movie tickets and overpriced drinks? Get a copy of the book from the library and read it at the beach. (But remember, with all the advertising, The Bielski Comrades will make more money this week at the box office...)

My next escapade - "open mike" at Borders. I know, I know, its not a big deal, but I wouldn't change it for anything, nor the moon over the Quaboag river, Salem, Cape Cod and the Oyster Festival, crab cakes, Marconi Beach, the cranberry fields in Maine, Franconia Notch (and the Flume) in New Hampshire, maple trees, or Indian Summer all the way from the Berkshires to Martha's Vineyard...

Those Floridians with "imported" sandy beaches and Californians with "transplanted" palm trees, what do they know? ☐

Investments - 401(K) from 3

investment product. The actual results will vary depending on your specific investment choices and market conditions.

Most 401(k) Plans offer a number of investment choices in a variety of risk categories. By diversifying among them, you can create a portfolio that best suits your personal situation, your financial goals and your risk tolerance. If you need more information about your 401(k) Plan account, be sure to consult a financial professional.

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Legal - Penalties in the U.S. from 3

Financial impact of the individual's departure;

Impact of a disruption of educational opportunities;

Psychological impact of the individual's departure;

Current political and economic conditions in the country to which the individual would be returned;

Family and other ties to the country to which the individual would be returned;

Contributions and ties to a community in the United States, including degree of integration into the society; and Immigration history.

The Consulate takes the position that extreme hardship is determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the particular circumstances of the individual applicant, and that each case must be decided on its own merits.

If the waiver is granted, the person can immigrate legally to the U.S. and rejoin their family.

If the waiver is denied, the immigrant would likely have to remain in Poland for ten years.

In my experience, applications that are submitted without thorough and careful legal arguments are usually denied. In some cases, the spouse will be stuck outside the country for 10 years.

These laws are now separating many Poles and others from their loved ones here for many years to come. If you or your family members are in this situation, you should get good legal advice before proceeding, or else the result could be a family broken up for the indefinite future. ☐