Chapter 3

War Begins

My name is Hans Wagner. I have blond hair and hazel eyes. I was 30 in 1939.

Structure. Order. Discipline. My father is a Major General in the Wehrmacht, and he has spent all his life dedicated to the service of our Fatherland. He is so proud of me for following in his footsteps and becoming a career military officer. As of my promotion in May, I am now a Lieutenant Colonel in the Wehrmacht’s infantry, and I have my own infantry battalion now. I know what this promotion means by careful hints my father would write to me, or when we were home at the same time. We live in Munich in Southeast Germany where my mother and three sisters still live. The love of my life lives in Munich, too, and she is not far from my parents’ house. I visit her and bring her gifts whenever I come home on furlough, or vacation time in the military. Her name is Bertina Schmidt, and all of my fellow officers and friends wonder when I will propose to her. “Not now,” I always say. Tides are shifting and something big is about to happen.

That something did happen, and I was one of the first groups to head right into the storm with my men. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Our plan was a simple and smart offense to finish any and all resistance quickly. We called it Blitzkrieg, or lightning war, with first a heavy barrage from the 1,000 planes. My battalion was waiting just outside the border we shared with Poland when I saw it. All of the planes flew overhead and seems to block out the skies by the sheer number. I heard thunder in the distance and thought that the high command would not invade with planes if a possible storm front was heading in. I was mistaken. The ground shook all the way back to the troops from the force of all the bombs dropped into Poland. This was only the start.

I watched from behind as column after column of tanks rolled across the Polish border, ready to crush any resistance found. 2,000 tanks crossed, loaded with machine guns, and their deadly turrets filled with enough explosives to devastate the land. The planes were returning after several hours of being gone. I knew they would help later, but for now, the first part of the operation was to make it inside of Poland and capture city after city. The reports poured in from the pilots of their successful bombing. I could feel that my Germany would prevail in this fight!

Not thirty minutes after the tanks left, I was given the orders to advance my battalion forward. We were heading into enemy territory, so I got all of my junior officers together to talk to them. “We are heading into Poland. Encourage you men and stay sharp. Any questions?”

“No, sir!” They all snapped back with a salute. With that, we headed into the unknown.

For two day, we marched onward, only encountering minimal resistance and taking out pockets of the people of the resistance. The Fuhrer wanted no prisoners until we were closer toward the Polish capital, Warsaw. It was our third day marching in that the reports came in on September 3. Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, and all of the British Empire had just declared war on us. According to intelligence, Great Britain had only 1,860 aircraft total and 230 warships. France had 855 aircraft and 156 warships. Germany may only have 57 warships, but ours are much more advanced and ready to take on the allies.

I was right, too. Barely a day later, the report came in of the British Royal Air Force, or RAF, had attacked part of our Germany navy. Not a single ship was lost, but 5 Wellington bombers and 29 Bristol Blenheim planes were shot down in their failed attempts. They called this failure the Heligoland Bight.

As we got closer to Warsaw, the resistance became stronger and stronger. These people really did not know that they could not win against the superior power of the Third Reich. The next day on September 5, we crossed the Vistula River only 51 miles from Warsaw. Our goal was insight! The only downside was all the men I had lost on the way to this eventual victory. The problem with being in command, it seems, is writing the reports of everyman lost in my battalion. However, the Fuhrer taught us not to worry because, in the end, the only thing that matters is the Fatherland. A report came in that day, too, that the United States had declared its neutrality. Relieved by this, I knew that, besides the weak minded of the first war, the United States was the reason of our failure of the Great War.

For the days to come, we are stopped outside of Warsaw as the resistance increases. Also, we must wait for resupplies and food to catch up with the ever approaching advance. On September 10, Canada declared war on us, and my commanding officer said to me that the Battle of the Atlantic has begun. Canada had an army of 4,261 men, 3,100 air force men and 270 aircraft, and 1,800 men in the navy with 6 destroyers and 4 minesweepers. There is no way they will be able to defend against our U-boat strategies called “Wolf Packs.” Just like a real wolf pack, one submarine finds a victim and then all converge to destroy the unsuspecting ship.

Ordered to hole up for now, I wrote a letter to my love Bertina. I told her of all the success we have been having. The glorious Third Reich will take over those foolish Polish and push on to the rest of Europe for our living space. I again proclaimed my love to her and promised to return as soon as the campaign against Poland had ended. I wished her well, but alas, I must be leaving to finish this battle.

We received news that the Soviet army had also invaded Poland on September 17. According to the reports, the Soviet army has a mass of 1,800,000 men at the ready in case of war, but only a small part was helping us take over Poland from the other side. Because of our non-aggression pact, we were to work together to accomplish this really minor battle against the almost nonexistent Polish army. Without their help, Germany could quite easily take Poland, so I see no reason to involve the help of this Red army and communist supporters. I did not voice my opinions, however, because I would do as my Fuhrer commands me.

Giving the clearance by High Command, we advanced forward closer and closer to Warsaw. For ten days we fought and stopped practically all resistance to our advance. Slowly making my way into the city, I noticed most of the intact buildings were abandoned. The rest did not fair very well. Our advance that started with bombings had devastated this part of the city with no one living in this section. On September 27, the Polish government surrendered to our glorious army. Their government did not want to see anymore of their city in ruins, nor did they think they could win with us Germans to the west and the Soviets coming in from the east. Two days later on September 29, the High Commands of Germany and Russia divided up Poland for each other and worked together. I was 30 years old. The thought Russia would end with Poland for now.