

The Diary of Staff Sergeant
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APRIL 24, 2000

I haven't had time to write anything for a while because we've been running ever since Kielce. 3rd ACR was caught in the middle of a Soviet armored push that decimated us and pushed 1st cav up to Piotrkov. Looks like their 9th Tank division went north and 20th Tank division went south, leaving the 39th MRD holding Kielce. Luckily, we hit them hard, and they didn't chase us.

APRIL 26, 2000

The LT says that we ought to head for Chestoshova, or whatever it's called, but we heard it took a nuke back in '98. Anyway, the regiment, or what's left of us, is moving west to try to link up with friendly units and maybe find some supplies. Bailey and Carter said they'd rather head for Krakow and see what they could find there. We split up our gear and separated. They headed southeast on foot. Lieutenant Anderson and the rest of us kept going west in the Humvee. The rest of the squadrons are still getting organized trying to take care of wounded, repair vehicles, and consolidate food, gas, and ammo, but for us it's "Scouts out" as usual.

MAY 18, 2000

It's been harder than we thought to slip past the Soviet tank patrols that run both north and south of us. We lost the humvee running from a platoon of BMPs west of Vloshchowva (why are all of these Polish names so damn hard to spell?). We had to ditch it in the river and found a boat that got us across. We took what we could carry without killing ourselves and left the rest in the truck when we pushed it into the water.

MAY 20, 2000

Chestonwhatsis was definitely nuked. We found ash miles away and locals told us it was gone. Apparently it had been a pretty historical place. Alvarez and me were scouting along a ridgeline last night and stayed in a cave about half a click west of a ruined castle we saw on a hill. We wanted to stay in the ruins, but that seemed too obvious. In the morning, we crawled around the rubble and found a rusted metal gate behind some piled wood. We opened it up and went down. The place was real spooky - cobwebs, rats, and all that. We didn't want to use up our flashlights so we didn't go in very far, but it seemed like a pretty big basement. Might be a good place to hole up what's left of the platoon. It was twilight when we got back to the camp, and Rudy had dinner waiting.

MAY 22, 2000

I wish we never found that damn gate in the ruins. Davis kept saying we should stay in there and use it as a base for scouting the area. The LT eventually agreed. We'd been out of contact too long, and he wanted to stop and get the prick working so we could get back in touch with the regiment and let them know about Chestochowa. Even I thought it was a great idea at the time. Maybe we could find something down there, like some old wine or something. Places like that are probably hidden for a reason, right?

We found the gate and made some torches to save our batteries and headed in, ignoring the signs posted by the entrance. The LT left Rudy outside to guard the entrance so nobody could come in behind us, and we stashed all of our excess gear in the ruins under a couple of tarps. The stone stairs led to a large room with some broken and rotted furniture. The rats seemed pretty well fed and curious, and we had to keep kicking them away. There was a room that looked like it had crumbled wine racks, but I didn't find any bottles. There was a place where one of the walls collapsed, exposing a tunnel. It looked like the part that caved in had been some kind of doorway made of stone like the walls, maybe to keep it hidden. We were all pretty curious too, plus we figured that's where the rats were coming from, so we went in. Bad idea.

Pretty soon we heard the sound of rushing water. We went on a little more and it got louder until the tunnel leveled off and we ran into this stream that came out of one wall and into the other. Alvarez said something about it being the river sticks and laughed like she made a joke. I didn't get it, but the LT told her to shut up. He was starting to get nervous. Davis said that at least the place had running water, and none of us even laughed. It was too creepy.

We went across and followed the passage on the other side. It went down a little bit then leveled off. The walls were getting rougher, but there were big areas on the sides in places that looked like they had been cut into the stone with picks. Jensen said it looked like they quarried the rock for the castle down here. We walked for a bit more. It's hard to tell how far you've gone when you're underground. None of us were counting our paces. We came to a bunch of other passages that went off right and left. Then we came to these little rooms with rotted wooden doors that had some piles of bones. There were bits of metal and leather, but only scraps of whatever clothing had been on the bodies. Alvarez was praying out loud, she was really scared, then she stopped, and her eyes got wide as saucers. We could all hear it then. It was a low moaning sound. The LT said it was the wind blowing across a pipe.

Well, Alvarez lost it. She just broke and ran. I don't know where. Down one of those tunnels I guess. I was too scared to stop her. She had one of the torches. The LT said we had to stick together and she would be ok. We lit the rest of the torches and went on. A few minutes later we heard a scream. I never heard a sound like that come out of a human throat, but it must have been Alvarez. LT Anderson didn't say anything, but I could see him swallowing hard, trying to look like he wasn't scared.

Davis said we should turn around and go back, but the LT said we had to go on, and so we did. Maybe he was looking for something, or maybe he just didn't want to find Alvarez someplace behind us with her throat torn out. It seemed like hours, but I think it wasn't very long. A couple of times I think we went over the same ground, but I'm not sure. We finally came to a place where there was a faint light coming from the passage off to the left. We went down it and we came to a large room.

It looked like a chapel or something. There were candles burning, so somebody else must live down there or visit once in a while. There were four bodies lying in alcoves like some kind of medieval royalty. They were Polish soldiers; I know the uniform. They had been dead for some time.

One had a pilot's helmet on. There was a raised altar or something at the far end of the room. An old painting was propped up on the altar. It was dark, and hard to make out, but I saw that it was a painting of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child, like on an old-time Christmas card. The frame was covered in gold. There was a gold cup next to it, and I reached out and picked it up. When I touched it I heard Davis scream, worse than Alvarez. I jumped and saw that there was someone standing next to one of the alcoves, and no body laying down! As God is my witness, it was standing up! Davis collapsed. The LT drew his pistol. I didn't see what happened next, I just ran. I remember crossing the stream again, and getting outside. I babbled something to Rudy, then grabbed my ruck then ran some more. I wanted to put as many miles between me and that place as I could. When I couldn't run any more, I stopped. I noticed that I'd cut myself pretty bad on something getting out. Laid open most of my left arm. And I still had the cup clenched in my hand. I guess you do weird things when you panic.

MAY 26? 2000

I've been walking for days. I don't have the faintest idea where I am, or know for sure what day it is. My arm is pretty stiff, but I don't have anything to treat it with except a little of the hooch we saved back last time we cooked fuel for the Humvee. I put half of it on the arm and half of it in me. Felt better for a while. Still heading west. Have to get back to the friendly lines.

MAY? 2000

Found a place to rest, built fire
Hard to write, arm hurts, eyes spin
Food ok, fire ok, for a while
hear dogs or something outside
too weak to get wood
gun after fire gone
saved last bullet