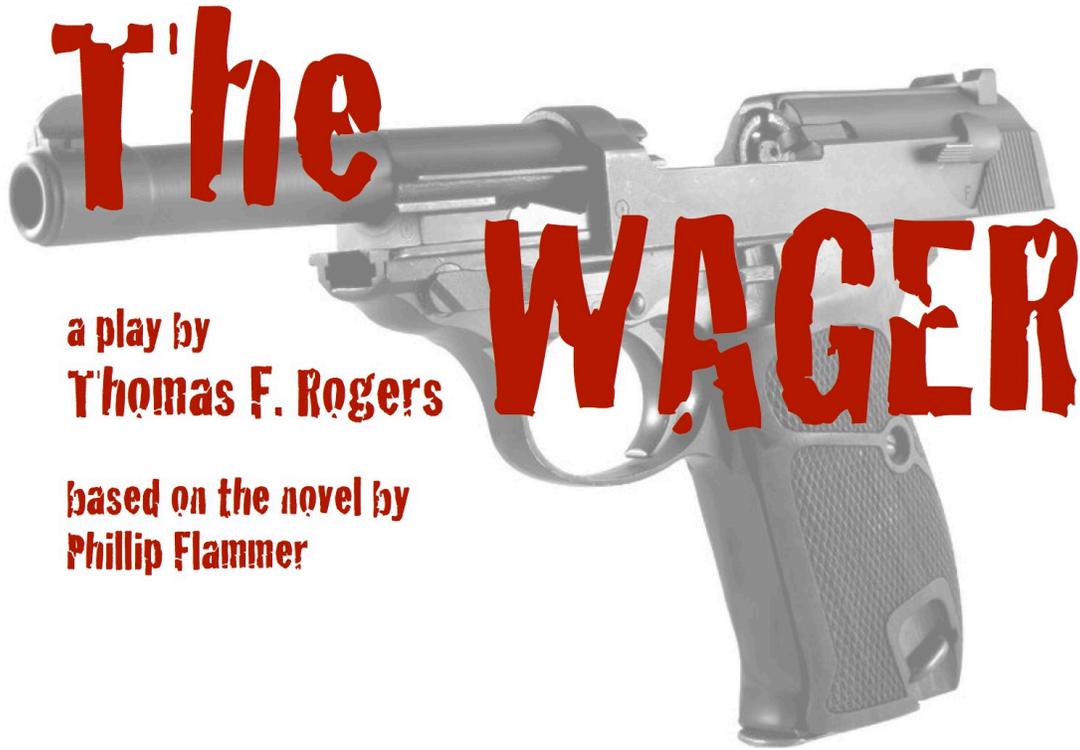


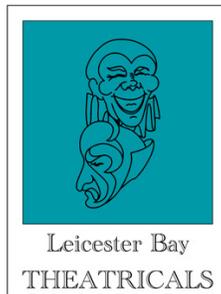
PRODUCTION SCRIPT



The
WAGER

a play by
Thomas F. Rogers

based on the novel by
Phillip Flammer



Salt Lake City

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Novel Unpublished © by Phillip Flammer

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THE WAGER

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Cast of Characters (In order of appearance) 14M

Captain SCHARFF -- SS Officer

Lieutenant Hugo SCHMIDT --

Captain Hans SCHMIDT -- non-speaking, in a coma

Private FROMM -- the “Professor”

Sergeant REINBERGER -- age 25

Sergeant HOFER --

Major Heinz HOLZCLAW --

Private Kurt BAUER -- overweight, middle-aged

HEYERLEIN -- somebody is in disguise!

MEDIC -- a Russian soldier

CAPTAIN -- a Russian soldier

RUSSIAN SOLDIER -- another Russian

1ST SOLDIER -- another Russian

2ND SOLDIER -- another Russian

Philip Meynard Flammer had a long career in the Air Force as an historian, most notably working in Saigon in '68-69 documenting the Vietnam War. He was the author of several books and articles on military history. He eventually joined the faculty at Brigham Young University, and taught as a military historian there for many years before his retirement and death. Phil influenced an entire generation of LDS thinkers and practitioners in the field of national security, especially through his writings on the subject of military ethics. Unfortunately, this legacy has largely been lost to our faith community.

Thomas F. Rogers -- A former director of the BYU Honors Program, Thomas F. Rogers is 'Professor' emeritus of Russian language and literature at Brigham Young University and the author of more than a score of plays, many on Mormon subjects. Four of these have been published in *God's Fools* (Signature Books, '983), which also received the Association of Mormon Letters Drama Prize that same year: **HUEBENER** (the first literary treatment of its subject), **FIRE IN THE BONES** (again, the first literary treatment of its subject, the '857 Mountain Meadows Massacre), **GOD'S FOOLS** (or **JOURNEY TO GOLGOTHA**) and **REUNION**. Other titles include: **The SECOND PRIEST, The ANOINTED** (an Old Testament narrative with music by C. Michael Perry) and **The SEAGULL** (translated and adapted from the Chekov play). In '992, **GENTLE BARBARIAN, FRERE LAWRENCE** and **CHARADES** were published in a second anthology entitled '*Huebener' and Other Plays by Thomas F. Rogers*. Rogers has also penned stage adaptations of Dostoevsky's novels **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT** and **THE IDIOT**, an opera libretto based on Hawthorne's **THE SCARLET LETTER**, a translation of Georg Buechner's **WOYCZEK** (produced at BYU), and scripts based on novels by local authors, Phillip Flammer and Ben Parkinson. The first of these received a BYU production, directed by Tad Danielewski, in which Rogers played the role of Marmeladov.

In '995-1996 **GOD'S FOOLS** was produced (in translation) by a professional repertory theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, where Rogers was then serving as an LDS mission president. He also played the role of the American double spy Cooper in that production. During that mission he directed LDS Church members in a stage adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and a Russian language version of **HUEBENER**. The play has also since been produced in Finland in the Finnish language, while a German translation still awaits forthcoming performances in that language.

At BYU and in Provo, Utah, Rogers directed the premiere productions of Robert Vincek's *For the Lions to Win*, Thom Duncan's *Matters of the Heart* and Eric Samuselsen's *Accommodations* and in Bountiful, Utah, a production of **HUEBENER**. Besides numerous productions in both Russian and German for the BYU Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages, he has directed Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* (in German) for Deutsches Teater Salt Lake City, where he also performed as an actor, and Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, Pirandello's *It Is So If You Think So* and Pinter's *The Caretaker* for the BYU Department of Theatre.

Cited by Eugene England as "undoubtedly the father of modern Mormon drama," Rogers received the Mormon Arts Festival's Distinguished Achievement Award in '998 and in 2002 a Lifetime Service Award from the Association of Mormon Letters. His published stories have appeared in volume 2, no. 2 of *Sunstone*, the Summer '991 and Winter 2001 issues of *Dialogue* (receiving an annual *Dialogue* fiction award) and in the collections *Christmas for the World* (SLC: Aspen Books, '991) and *The Gifts of Christmas* (SLC: Deseret Book Co., '999). Rogers has served as editor of *Encyclia*, journal of the Utah Academy, and authored two critical monographs: '*Superfluous Men' and the Post-Stalin 'thaw'* (The Hague: Mouton, '972) and *Myth and Symbol in Soviet Fiction* (San Francisco & New York: The Edwin Mellen Research University Press, '992).

Rogers studied at the Yale School of Drama and holds degrees from the University of Utah, Yale, and Georgetown. He has also studied theater in Poland and Russian at Moscow State University and taught at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the University of Utah. He has intensively studied some ten languages and had extensive residences in Russia, Eastern Europe, Germany, Austria, India, China and the Middle East. He and his wife Merriam are the parents of seven children, thirty-eight grandchildren and, so far, three great grandchildren. They reside in Bountiful, Utah.

THE WAGER

Act I

SCENE -- The time is early March, 1945; the place, a remote village on the eastern edge of the Arns forest in East Prussia; the scene: a large, semi-dark cellar. The cellar is square, with several steps at the back of the stage leading up to a heavy door, barred by two beams layed crosswise. A large wooden box, turned upside down, serves as a table on which rests a single lighted candle. Three stools are scattered about the room. In one corner stands a wooden water barrel with a tin dipper hanging on the side. Near the barrel, a stretcher, with a red cross painted on it, leans against the wall. One figure lies motionless a few feet from the water barrel. Near the center of the stage, a soldier holds and bandages the head of another soldier. A fourth soldier is trying to read by the light of the candle while a fifth nervously moves about the room. After pacing back and forth several times, he strides to the figures in the center of the room.

SCHARFF: How's your brother? Any improvement?

SCHMIDT: No. Just the same. He won't even try to speak, and his wound is seeping again.

SCHARFF: Let me have a look.

(He takes a hurried look and continues speaking in a casual voice)

He'll be all right. Fromm, ask the Sergeant over there if he wants a drink.

FROMM: *(looking up from his reading)* I just did, Captain. Half an hour ago.

SCHARFF: Did he take any water?

FROMM: No.

SCHARFF: Then ask him again.

FROMM: Yes, sir.

(He rises and goes to the figure by the water barrel. He stoops and speaks to him in an inaudibly soft voice, then returns to his seat at the table.)

SCHARFF: Lieutenant, I'll bet you got mad as hell when your men fled this God forsaken place and refused to take your brother.

SCHMIDT: What really burned me was the regimental commander. He had a staff car. He could have taken Hans, but he thought more of his case of champagne. I should have killed him on the spot. And if I ever see him again, I will kill him, so help me!

SCHARFF: What do you expect from motley infantry? They don't even know what real loyalty is. But the SS now--our loyalty is our honor.

SCHMIDT: *(agitated)* If that's true, how come your comrades didn't take you with them?

SCHARFF: I was knocked unconscious by a shell. They must have left me for dead.

SCHMIDT: You don't know for certain, and, anyway, no one tried to make sure. Admit it, Captain, when it gets down to the nitty-gritty, the SS is no better than anyone else.

SCHARFF: Careful, Lieutenant. The loyalty and honor of the SS are not to be questioned by you or by anyone else. Do I make myself clear? I have some scores to settle but not with the ones you think.

FROMM: Lieutenant, could I get you some more bandages?

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SCHMIDT: Please.

(FROMM leaves his book to get some bandages from a box in the corner)

SCHARFF: Tell me, 'Professor,' I mean Private. Who are *you* going to settle with when you get back to our lines?

FROMM: I have no one to settle with. No one to blame. The last thing I remember was being part of a convoy. It was so dark and terrible, I ...

SCHARFF: Remember nothing. Sergeant Reinberger told me he found you wandering around in a daze. Says you were suffering from a concussion. Somebody didn't take care of *you* either.

FROMM: I don't know anything about that. I only know that I want to get back to my wife and my books. You see, I was not cut out for soldiering.

SCHMIDT: Even a blind man could see that. Things must be pretty bad back on the home front when they drag pot bellied professors out of bed and shove a rifle into their hands.

SCHARFF: Tell me, 'Professor'. Did they give you any training at all?

FROMM: For two or three days.

SCHARFF: *(mockingly)* And I'll bet you never pulled a trigger without closing both eyes. Right?

FROMM: I said I was not cut out for soldiering.

SCHARFF: Well, no matter. That's your loss, not mine. I just hope you can keep up when Sgt. Reinberger gets back and shows us the way out of this trap. If we have to move fast, you just might find yourself alone out there dodging Russian patrols.

SCHMIDT: How long has he been gone? Are you sure he didn't tell you how long he'd be gone?

SCHARFF: For Hell's sake, Lieutenant, this is the fiftieth time you've asked.

(He looks at his watch)

Now, for the last time, he's been gone just over twelve hours and, no, he did not tell me when he would be back.

SCHMIDT: You should have asked. After all, you are the commander.

SCHARFF: I could have asked, but I didn't. It's my prerogative as a commander not to ask. Besides, you know how Reinberger is. He does things the way he wants to. He knows his way around behind the enemy lines and, for the present, that's what counts.

SCHMIDT: There's no doubt that he's a real professional. Did you have a chance to look at that knife of his? It's had a lot of use. I asked him about it yesterday but he only said that "*Liebchen*," as he calls, it--imagine speaking about a knife as if it were a mistress--anyway, he said, "*Liebchen* and I know how to get along."

FROMM: May I ask, Captain, why, if Sgt. Reinberger is such a good soldier, he is still a common sergeant?

SCHARFF: Beats me. Not everyone appreciates a man like him. He must have rubbed some officer's fur the wrong way. His kind need a tight rein.

SCHMIDT: I noticed that too. Frankly, I'm a little afraid of him.

SCHARFF: Considering that you are infantry, that doesn't surprise me. Me -- I know how to handle his kind. They obey if you

(pulling his pistol from his holster and aiming at an imaginary target)

Bam! And that's what you do if he gets out of line. Shoot him between the eyes.

SCHMIDT: You don't like him, do you?

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SCHARFF: I need him, like you do. But a commander doesn't have to like anybody.

SCHMIDT: I don't think he likes you either, or any of us for that matter, except maybe Sergeant Hofer over there.

SCHARFF: I don't give a damn if he likes me or not. My duty is to command. His is to obey. If he betrays me by getting out of line, I'll kill him. It's as simple as that.

SCHMIDT: Alright. But what's to prevent him from going off on his own, like right now for instance? He could be half way back to our lines by now.

SCHARFF: *(suddenly very angry)* He wouldn't dare, I tell you. His kind are born to obey. Besides, he knows I would come looking for him if he ran out on us. And then he would die slowly, very, very slowly.

FROMM: Gentlemen.

SCHARFF: "Captain" to you.

FROMM: Sorry, sir. But I thought you might like to know that you don't have to worry about Sergeant Reinberger. He won't run away.

SCHMIDT: What makes you so sure?

FROMM: Because he didn't flee with the others when he had the chance. Don't you see? It's obvious that he stayed behind to help Sergeant Hofer. He may not care very much about the rest of us. But he won't leave Sergeant Hofer.

SCHMIDT: So you say.

SCHARFF: Knock it off, Lieutenant. The 'Professor' is right. Besides, by this time day after tomorrow, we should all be through the Arns forest and back on friendly territory.

SCHMIDT: I hope you're right. Hans needs a doctor bad.

(There are suddenly three knocks on the door, followed by a pause and then two others.)

SCHARFF: *(jubilant)* It's Reinberger. You were right, 'Professor'. He's back. Open the door and let's get our own little retreat underway.

(REINBERGER enters, dressed in a snow camouflauge uniform. He is a young man, about 25, but he looks very tired and is obviously both suspicious and unhappy.)

SCHARFF: Well, what did you find? When can we start moving?

REINBERGER: What plans have you made?

SCHARFF: *(grabbing Reinberger by the uniform)* What the hell kind of question is that? I needed the information from you before setting up the plans. Now, tell me what I want to know before I take care of you once and for all.

REINBERGER: The question has some meaning, but forget it. You wouldn't understand if I spit it out in words of one syllable.

(SCHARFF starts to speak, but REINBERGER quickly continues.)

The Arns forest is crawling with Russian patrols. There is no way through for a group. Even a real pro would have trouble. As a unit, we have no chance at all.

SCHMIDT: *(throwing his brother aside to stand up)* You're joking!

SCHARFF: And I don't like such jokes.

REINBERGER: Do you want me to lie to you? There is no way through, so forget it.

SCHARFF: But how can you be sure? You were gone just a little over two hours.

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REINBERGER: You mean, did I see enough to convince me? The answer is, I saw more than enough. It's daylight out, you know, and the snow helps show their tracks. I also went back a good six kilometers.

SCHMIDT: Six kilometers isn't very far. It must be forty kilometers back to our lines by now. If six kilometers is as deep as the patrols are, we could get through them tonight.

REINBERGER: You don't hear well, Lieutenant. I said six clicks was as far as I went. I didn't say that's how deep the patrols went. They may go all the way to the Oder, as far as I know. They got thicker the farther west I went.

SCHARFF: Still, you said that someone trained in escape and evasion would make it. You are trained. You can get us through.

REINBERGER: Your hearing is no better than the Lieutenant's. I said a pro might make it through. But a motley group, with wounded, wouldn't last an hour.

SCHMIDT: You're making this up.

REINBERGER: Then go on out and see for yourself. But say goodbye before you go because you won't be coming back.

SCHARFF: It's ... it's as bad as that?

REINBERGER: The naked truth is that, even without the wounded, we would have less than one chance in a thousand. With them, we have absolutely no chance at all.

SCHARFF: Then we will have to go without the wounded.

REINBERGER: You better think this through, Captain. Schmidt won't leave his brother, and I'll be damned if I leave Hofer. That leaves only you and the fat 'Professor'. You two can try it on your own if you like, but as I said, say 'goodbye' before you go.

SCHARFF: Sergeant Reinberger, I order you to take us back. Leave Hofer and half Schmidt and take us back. I am in command here. Disobey my orders and you are guilty of disloyalty and treason. I can have you shot.

REINBERGER: Well, well, well ... If we could help win the war, that might stop me. But the war is lost. You know that as well as I do. I see what you are doing. You, whose loyalty is his honor, orders me to save him at the expense of the wounded. I don't see how leadership can get much lower than that.

SCHARFF: (*shouting*) I am ordering you, don't you understand? I am ordering you!

REINBERGER: And I am rejecting your order.

(Scharff starts to draw his pistol. REINBERGER grabs his arm before the weapon can be taken from its holster.)

Before you do anything rash, Captain, you had better hear me out. I have more information to give you.

SCHARFF: Like what?

REINBERGER: Like all the activity in the Arnswald can only mean one thing. The big Russian forces on the bluffs east of here are getting ready to move. And when they do, they will pass through here.

SCHARFF: Move? Are you certain? Oh, God, this is awful!

REINBERGER: You're damn right it is. It means that our little tragedy is just about over. We can't flee, and fighting won't slow the Russians a bit. Let's see you figure your way out of that one, Captain.

SCHARFF: Are you certain we have almost no time left? You could be wrong, you know.

REINBERGER: (*picking up a rifle*) I know that. That's why, now that it's getting dark, I intend to head east and have a look. That is, if you will order me to.

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SCHARFF: Go ahead.

REINBERGER: (*mockingly*) Thanks. I would hate to do something as dangerous as this without your permission.

FROMM: Sergeant Reinberger, may I go with you?

REINBERGER: What?

FROMM: I want to go with you. Please. I will do everything you say. But it is important to me. Please.

REINBERGER: So they are getting on your nerves too.

(*pause*)

My better judgment says 'no,' but what the hell. I could use some level headed company at least part of the way

(*They dress Fromm in a white camoflaugue uniform, and the two depart. SCHARFF watches the two go out the door. He then rebars it and starts toward Schmidt, who is again tending to his brother.*)

SCHARFF: Did you ever see such insubordination? Where has real soldiering gone? No wonder we are losing the war.

SCHMIDT: I notice that you didn't shoot him between the eyes. Maybe you too are afraid of him.

SCHARFF: (*kneeling beside Schmidt*) Listen, Hugo, you and I have our differences. And that is a shame. But it's time we looked at this whole matter from a mutual point of view.

SCHMIDT: I don't follow you.

SCHARFF: Don't you see? Sgt. Hofer is the cause of all our trouble. I think Reinberger may have been exaggerating about the Russian activity in the Arnswald.

SCHMIDT: But why? What does he have to gain by that?

SCHARFF: Look. Reinberger is like Hofer. He has sort of given up on life. He doesn't care much whether he lives or dies, so why not spend his last hours with his best friend?

SCHMIDT: I still don't understand.

SCHARFF: For hell's sake, listen a minute. I'm trying to explain. Reinberger could hardly come back from the Arnswald and say there is a way out and then refuse to help us. Even if he didn't want to do so, I could legally order him to help. So, you see, he has to say, or maybe even believe, that there is no way.

SCHMIDT: So?

SCHARFF: So Hofer over there is a key. If he were not around, Reinberger would come to his senses. There would be no reason for him to stay.

SCHMIDT: I still don't get it. If Reinberger won't carry out Hofer, what makes you think he would help carry out Hans? No. I think Reinberger is telling the truth about the patrols.

SCHARFF: Look over there by the water barrel. What do you see?

SCHMIDT: What am I supposed to see?

SCHARFF: The stretcher, damn it. There is only one stretcher. Now do you get me? We only have one stretcher. And it takes four men to carry it for any distance. Reinberger knows that only one wounded man can get out. That makes it a contest of sorts between Hofer and your brother.

SCHMIDT: You're right. That makes sense. *Mensch*, what a dilemma for Reinberger.

SCHARFF: Forget about Reinberger for the moment. Your brother is your worry. His survival--and yours--depends on what happens to Hofer. Admit it, Hugo. Until you deal with Hofer, your odds on getting your

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brother to a doctor are nil, and you know it. Your only other alternative is to stay here with your brother and meet the Russians head on, or else put a bullet in his head, and yours before they get here.

SCHMIDT: *(his eyes welling with tears)* I don't ... follow you.

SCHARFF: If you have half the guts you ought to, you will put a bullet through the Sergeant's head.

SCHMIDT: Oh God. No. You can't be serious. I could never kill a fellow German. I couldn't. I just couldn't.

SCHARFF: Very well. Keep the bullet for your brother. When the Russians come knocking on the door, blow his brains out. Then, if you have any guts left, take one or two Russians with you when you go.

SCHMIDT: But Sgt. Hofer isn't hurting anybody. I don't know if he's ever hurt anybody. He just ... lying there.

SCHARFF: Yes, he is lying there waiting to die. Can't you see it in his eyes? He'd put a bullet in his own head if he could lift a gun. You'd be doing him a favor.

SCHMIDT: So...

(walks to HOFER and looking him over)

Do you really think so? He's dying, isn't he? He just lies there and speaks to nobody but Reinberger. I suppose if I were he ...

SCHARFF: If you were he you would welcome death. Even if he lives, he'll be a basket case all his life. Any old veteran who has lived out his life would prefer death to that.

SCHMIDT: You ... you might be right. I might be doing him a favor.

SCHARFF: *(pointing his index finger at his own temple and clicking his tongue)* It's as simple as that. His worries are over, and so are yours.

SCHMIDT: But couldn't *you* do it? You're used to that sort of thing.

SCHARFF: *(angry)* You make me sick. You applaud leadership with backbone, and then you back off from a simple act of putting a man out of his misery. Hell, no, I won't do it for you. My bullets are dumb-dumbs. They would tear his head off. Besides, why should I do your dirty work?

SCHMIDT: Please!

SCHARFF: No, if you want your brother saved, *you* save him. And let me tell you this: if you haven't got the guts to shoot Hofer, you sure as hell can't expect me to help carry your nitwit brother back to our lines. You are a fool if you doubt that for an instant.

SCHMIDT: *(now shouting)* All right, all right! I'll do it!

(Long pause, then in a dejected voice)

What will we tell Reinberger?

SCHARFF: I'll handle Reinberger. He'll get mad as hell, but he won't go crazy. I'll tell him Hofer went bezerk, and I ordered you to kill him. That should lay the matter to rest.

(Schmidt gently takes the pistol from his own holster and approaches the sergeant. Sergeant Hofer opens his eyes and speaks for the first time.)

HOFER: Killing time, Lieutenant? Tell me, are you doing this for me, for your brother, or for the Captain?

(Schmidt recoils and backs away.)

SCHARFF: *(shouting)* Shoot him, damn it! Shoot him! We don't know when Reinberger will be back. If Hofer is not dead when he arrives, your brother is lost and so are we because Hofer will tell him. He has to die, and now.

SCHMIDT: I can't. I can't.

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SCHARFF: Here, give me the pistol -- I'll shoot him myself.

(As Scharff reaches for the gun, a loud pounding is heard on the door.)

Oh God! It's the Russians!

SCHMIDT: What are we going to do?

SCHARFF: How should I know. I ... I ... Oh God!

HOLZCLAW: *(offstage)* Open up in there. In the name of the Fuehrer, open this door before I kick it in.

SCHMIDT: He's German! He's German!

SCHARFF: Ask him who he is and what he wants.

HOLZCLAW: *(offstage)* Major Heinz Holzclaw of the Luftwaffe. Open up, for hell's sake! I know there are four of you in there. I know about the wounded and I know about you too, Scharff and Schmidt. Open up! I'm not a patient man.

SCHARFF: It might be a trick. Ask him how he knows about us.

SCHMIDT: How do you know about the Captain and myself? You understand we have to be careful.

HOLZCLAW: *(offstage)* Sergeant Reinberger and the fat private told me how to get here. What more do you want?

SCHARFF: It could still be a trick. Ask him how he came to Arnswald.

SCHMIDT: I'm sorry I have to ask you this, Herr Major, how did you come to this God forsaken place? We are isolated here. The Russians are up on the bluffs above town and may be moving through here any day. What's a lone flyer doing here?

HOLZCLAW: *(offstage, impatiently)* I was flying to Betteln for the high command to pick up some idiot Colonel. But the damned engine quit two kilometers west of here. I barely dead sticked it to the fields west of town.

SCHMIDT: You were lucky, Major, to get out alive.

HOLZCLAW: *(offstage)* Luck had nothing to do with it. You don't get to fly these special missions without real skill. Anyway, after the crash landing, I accidentally ran into Reinberger and the fat private. They sent me here.

SCHARFF: Yeah. Well, it sounds fishy to me. If you found Reinberger and the 'Professor', or they found you, why didn't they bring you here? It would have saved a lot of trouble.

HOLZCLAW: *(offstage)* I ordered them to keep watch over the village throughout the night just in case the Russians come probing around. If we're going to get us out of this mess, we'll need all the information we can get. Now I've had more than enough of this nonsense. Unless I'm mistaken, I am the ranking officer here. So, if you don't want more trouble than you can handle, open this door and be damned quick about it.

SCHARFF: All right, Major. Lieutenant Schmidt will open the door.

(Scharff unholsters his pistol and chambers a round.)

But you understand that we must still be careful. Back down the stairs and keep your hands in clear view all the time. All right, Schmidt, light the candle and bring it over here.

(The door is unbarred, and HOLZCLAW finally appears, then slowly backs down. He is a large mean looking man with regal bearing, obviously sure of himself. He tests the steps as he comes down. Schmidt walks around him with a candle held face high.)

SCHARFF: You may turn around now, Major.

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(Scharff clears his pistol, places it in the holster and comes stiffly to attention)

Captain Scharff -- SS at your service, Herr Major.

HOLZCLAW: So you're the SS officer Reinberger told me about.

(He turns to Schmidt.)

And you, I suppose are Lieutenant Schmidt of the Infantry. Who are the other two on the floor?

SCHMIDT: The one in a coma is my brother, Herr Major. He is a very brave officer, but he has a seeping head wound. He needs medical help. And the other ...

SCHARFF: I can answer for him, Herr Major. He is a sergeant of some kind or other. He picked up some shrapnel in his back. He's paralyzed from the chest down. He's about given up on life and won't talk to anyone except Reinberger. In my opinion, sir, both he and Half-Schmidt are liabilities. We'd be better off without them. But Reinberger will be your main problem.

HOLZCLAW: How's that?

SCHARFF: He's insolent, arrogant, and doesn't give a damn about rank or obeying orders. He makes his own rules.

HOLZCLAW: Oh he does, does he? Well, he won't last long. I'll deal with him personally when the time comes. He'll obey. I can promise you that. Meanwhile, you get this straight: I am the commander now. I make the decisions.

SCHARFF: I respect your wishes, Herr Major. I'm happy to take my rightful place as second in command. You need only tell me what you want done, Herr Major. SS men are hard as steel. My loyalty is my honor.

HOLZCLAW: I'll count on it. But now I must leave for an hour or so. I need something from the airplane. I will knock four times when I want back in.

SCHMIDT: Our customary signal is three long knocks followed by two short ones.

HOLZCLAW: I will knock four times. Don't keep me waiting again.

SCHARFF: *Jawohl*, Herr Major. We understand perfectly.

(The HOLZCLAW leaves. The cellar door is hurriedly barred again.)

SCHARFF: *(mockingly)* Well, Schmidt, what do you think of the iron-willed major?

SCHMIDT: He's all we need and more. He has enough backbone to handle you and Reinberger both. And he'll get us all out of this mess. I know he will.

SCHARFF: *(pulling his pistol from its holster and polishing it, now and then letting it reflect the light of the candle)* So you say. But he's just a flyer. Has he got the guts to make cold-hearted decisions like which of the wounded have to be left behind, or whether we should kill them both? Damn, I wish we knew whether he had escape and evasion experience.

SCHMIDT: You can count on one thing, Scharff, I won't leave my brother and I won't let the Major or anyone else kill him.

SCHARFF: Suit yourself. You belong with your nit-wit brother anyway. Besides, that makes it easier. If Reinberger won't leave Hofer, then the Major and I can go it alone.

SCHMIDT: That is, if the Major knows what he is doing, which is not likely. And what about the 'Professor'? You neglected to mention him.

SCHARFF: I didn't neglect him. He doesn't count, that's all. He'd be as big a burden as the wounded. He can stay behind and die with the rest of you.

The Wager by *Thomas F. Rogers*

SCHMIDT: You know something, Scharff? You were a pathetically poor commander. I can see why Reinberger hates you so.

SCHARFF: *(lying down as if going to sleep)* If you are trying to hurt my feelings, Lieutenant, you are wasting your time. The 'Professor' doesn't bother me because he doesn't count. You don't count either, not now. Go to sleep.

SCHMIDT: Go to hell.

(The two men are comfortably settled when three long knocks on the door are followed by three short ones. Scharff and Schmidt instantly leap to their feet)

SCHARFF: That has to be Reinberger. He's been gone less than an hour. Something must be wrong.

(He quickly opens the door and admits Reinberger and the 'Professor')

REINBERGER: What took you two comics so long? What are you trying to do, hide something?

SCHARFF: Nothing serious. Hofer flew off the handle, but we got him quieted down.

REINBERGER: Where did the Major go?

SCHARFF: He went back to the plane to get something. He didn't say what.

REINBERGER: Stupid. He's asking for it going out there alone. He's even dumber than I thought. When he comes in, tell him I found out when the Russians are planning to move.

SCHMIDT: You found out? How? When are they moving?

REINBERGER: Day after tomorrow.

SCHARFF: And how did you get that priceless bit of information? Ask their general?

REINBERGER: Hell, no. But I killed a couple of his men. I had to tickle their throats with my knife a little but they talked plenty before the blood began to flow. They move day after tomorrow in the morning. That gives us about 36 hours.

SCHARFF: Don't you think it was stupid to kill them? Their friends aren't going to like that. I'll bet you didn't even hide the bodies.

REINBERGER: Strange logic for one who has made liquidation a profession. But you only show your ignorance. Good soldiers don't have to hide bodies. It's the SS who have to cover their tracks.

SCHARFF: Your big mouth is going to stop flapping when the Major gets back. You didn't stay out all night the way you were supposed to and you killed two Russians, which means their comrades are going to be looking for revenge come morning. But before they get here, the Major and I are going to eat you alive.

REINBERGER: Well, wake me up first. I'm so tired I could drop.

SCHMIDT: First, tell us about the Russians.

REINBERGER: Fair enough. After I've had a drink.

(Reinberger walks to the water barrel, fills the dipper and drinks slowly, taking individual swallows. He then fills the dipper and gives Hofer a drink. Reinberger and Hofer talk for some 30-40 seconds but in such low voice that no one can tell what they are saying. Twice Reinberger looks up at Scharff and Schmidt.)

REINBERGER: On second thought, the 'Professor' can tell you what you need to know about the Russians. He knows as much about it as I do.

(Anxiously glances about the room, Fromm looks several times to Reinberger for help. Reinberger ignores him and appears to go to sleep. At last, slowly and hesitatingly, the 'Professor' begins speaking)

The Wager by Thomas F. Rogers

FROMM: It ... was ... horrible. I mean, Sergeant Reinberger guessed that there were at least two Russian sentries watching the village from a grove of trees part way up the bluff. He left me down by the river and then, without making any noise, crept up there and caught one of them alone, emptying his bladder. He ... killed him without making ... a sound. Then he put the dead man's coat on and walked over to the other Russia, who was watching the village through field glasses. The sergeant used his ... knife to make the man talk. The Russian gave us the information we wanted before ...

(The Professor's voice has grown weak and he appears nauseated.)

SCHARFF: Before Reinberger killed him.

FROMM: *(reluctantly)* Ja.

SCHARFF: And it tore your insides out to be a witness, didn't it? You know absolutely nothing about war and killing and yet here you are playing soldier with veterans. History will never have to guess why we lost this war.

FROMM: You have no cause to talk to me like that.

SCHARFF: · How does it feel, learned 'Professor,' to be completely useless, to know you can't do a damn thing to help anyone, even from a distance? Foolish, huh? It's hollow old goats like you who have betrayed the fatherland.

FROMM: *(his eyes welling with tears)* I'm an old man, and I may appear very foolish. I don't deny that. But I am human, and right now I feel so sorry for those two Russians who are dead up there on the bluff. Their families won't even know about them. How will they feel when ...

SCHARFF: So your contribution to the war is feeling sorry for the enemy.

FROMM: *(angrily)* No! I lost my home in the bombing, and my wife and I were both wounded. But, beyond that, we gave our only son to the war. It was the most sacred, most valuable sacrifice we could have made.

SCHARFF: You act as if you were the only father who ever lost a son in a war. There's nothing heroic about that.

FROMM: You have no right to speak to me like that. I am not heroic. But my son died a hero in Odessa. There was an uprising among the Russian prisoners, and my son saved the camp commander's life. He got the Knight's Cross for that, but he was more than just a brave man. He was the gentlest, finest youth I have ever known. My life ended when his did. And for the same reason.

SCHARFF: So a stupid, idealistic young lieutenant died heroically. Don't fool yourself, old man. Decorations are common in wartime. I have a chest full. Your son probably got drunk, fell down and broke his neck.

FROMM: *(speaking majestically)* You don't know my son. He was, from beginning to end, an honorable man. He died a hero. You have no right ...

SCHARFF: *(shouting)* Forget your damn son. He accomplished nothing. You have accomplished nothing. You are a liability to us, don't you understand? If you had any guts or sense, you'd go out that door and get lost.

(Professor Fromm hesitates, stammers, and eventually lies down by Reinberger. In a minute he is asleep. The lights dim.)

10 pages in Act Two

10 pages in Act Three

End of Perusal