



*Who are the best secret agents in the world? Gypsies, says one of the top espionage men operating in Europe during World War II. He worked with them. Meet Jan Yoors—the legendary underground hero they called*

## THE WILD GOOSE

Watching once again the last of the sun drain away among the crags and gorges of the Pyrenees, Captain Utley felt a twist of panic.

"If I could move a muscle," he muttered hoarsely, "I would laugh. Me—me, with a lifetime spent over hot asphalt—and this is the way I go out. Sunk to my chin in snow!"

The words signified that hope had at last deserted even Captain Utley, Big Bill Utley, who'd been a stock-car jockey before he became a bomber pilot, and a varsity light-heavyweight before that. (Continued on page 77)

BY ANDREW St. GEORGE

ILLUSTRATED BY PHILIP RONFER





## The Wild Goose *Continued from page 23*

And the eyes of the ragtag group, huddled around him in the snow, showed that no one had missed the point.

It was a curious group—nineteen men, divided by seven different nationalities, but chained together in a desperate attempt to escape from occupied France into neutral Spain. For three nights and three days they had been struggling across the Lower Pyrenees, searching for the route that would take them across the border. By now, each of them had realized that they were hopelessly lost in a soundless, smothering wasteland of snow.

"Wha' I wanna see," complained a gaunt-eyed Canadian bombardier, slurring painfully with a bloated tongue, "is a short cut to a hot grog." At the thought of the steaming glass, he lurched up in sudden rage. "Wha' I wanna know," he bellowed wildly, "is how in demnation we got into this mess! Who's that bleeding little devil that's led us up here, anyway?"

All eyes swung toward the leader who was kneeling in the snow some thirty yards away, whispering to the helpless guide.

"Anyone know about him?" rasped an English major whose shoeless foot was tied up in a bloody handkerchief.

"I know his name," said a chunky American. "At least, I'm pretty sure it's him. Heard of him in London."

"What's his bloody name?"

"The Wild Goose," said the American. Seeing the sudden anger on the encircling faces, he added, "It's a fact. That's all the name he's got. The Wild Goose. I heard it from a brigadier. They're waiting for him in London."

"With a rope, I trust," coughed the Canadian.

"No," said the American. "A medal, I think."

"This time," said the major bitterly, "your goose won't make it back to the nest. Not this time, bucko. Not for all the medals in Whitehall."

The story of the Wild Goose, the espionage wizard who launched a private war against Nazi Germany with a pioneer sabotage operation and ended it—in 1944—as the leader of an Allied "underground railroad," became a mess-hall legend so rapidly that no historian ever got around to sorting out the fact and the fiction. This state of affairs couldn't last, of course, for someone was bound to discover—in truth, ARGOSY's editors did—that the facts were well worth boiling down, if only for this simple reason: they were more fabulous than the fiction.

Distinguished vagabonds are not, for the most part, born to adventure. The man who became the Wild Goose was no exception. He was born on April 12, 1922, with the prosaic Flemish name of Jan Yoors, into a sedate, middle-class family in prosperous Antwerp. But he embarked on his career early: at the age of twelve, a small, cherubic, unremarkable person, he marched off to school one May morning and did not return for seven and a half months. In that time, he had traveled through Holland, Germany, Austria, Rumania, Hungary and most of France.

Although this excursion and its consequences eventually became a matter of con-

cern to such institutions as His Britannic Majesty's Government and the German General Staff, the events leading up to it were never quite set straight. Jan Yoors himself, in retrospect, tended to blame it on a pair of sawed-off shoes. In any case, these are the facts:

The shoes in question were calfskin and of a strawberry hue; and on that certain May morning Jan wore them to school.

After classes, Jan stopped to admire a caravan of wandering gypsies; his shoes, in turn, became an object of admiration to half-a-dozen barefoot gypsy children. Jan took off the shoes to pass them around, and inevitably the biggest fellow in the crowd decided to try them on.

The shoes were too small. The gypsy boy pulled out a knife, and after a polite glance at Jan—who made no protest—sliced off the toes of both shoes. They still would not accommodate his feet, so he passed them back to Jan with a courteous shrug of regret.

The brand-new boots were ruined, giving Jan tangible reason to postpone his return home as late as possible. Yet he felt immensely elated, not unlike the Milwaukee-mannered commuter who finally encounters the office blonde and a triple martini at the same decisive instant. He trotted along behind his new-found friends, staring at the campfires and the dark men and women who chanted and swayed to wild melodies, until sleep bowled him over toward daybreak.

He awoke at noon to the bellows of the gendarmes chasing the caravan out of town.

"Get under a bed," someone yelled.

Jan obeyed so well that he wasn't discovered until hours later, when the bed, which was nailed to the floorboards of a caravan wagon, had already covered the better part of the way to the Dutch frontier. The Wild Goose was on his way.

Jan's father, a gentle, stoical, stained-glass artist, accepted events with the rarest kind of equanimity. He refused not only to dispatch the police after his vagrant son, but backed him up in later years whenever the constabulary detached him from a gypsy camp under the suspicion that he had been kidnaped.

Far from trying to acquire young Yoors by force, however, the gypsies viewed the prospect of having him along with some distaste.

"Look at him, a real traveler," they mocked shrilly, trying to chase him. "A regular *vadnratsal!*"

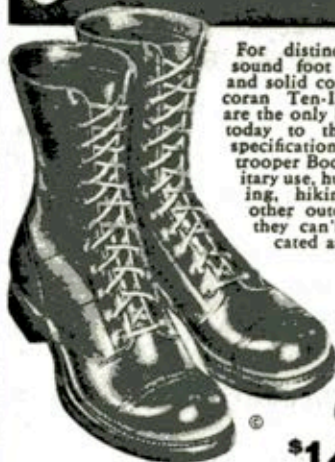
But Jan hung on, for he had found his world. In a few days, *vadnratsal*—gypsy for "wild goose"—grew from a jibe into an identification, and then into an affectionate name. Except for short months which he spent home now and then, mostly in the cold of winter, Jan Yoors became the Wild Goose—the only sandy-haired, blue-eyed gypsy on the highways of Europe.

Blue eyes and fair hair are as startling a combination on a nomadic gypsy as an RAF mustache on a Goldwyn girl. They gave innumerable highway troopers a bad moment of disbelief and suspicion. In time, news of the Wild Goose filtered across the English channel and up to higher eche-

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## Are You Plane-Wise?

Can you match these names and terms pertaining to planes and flying, with the brief descriptions and/or explanations of each? Nine correct answers is passing; 10 to 13, good; 14 to 15, excellent.

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. EMPENNAGE       | (a) maximum height to which a given aircraft can climb.                             |
| 2. REV             | (b) a plane with the propeller in the rear of the wings.                            |
| 3. JOY STICK       | (c) the framework or body of a plane.   |
| 4. HOP             | (d) the rear of a plane.  |
| 5. TAXI            | (e) a plane with one pair of wings.   |
| 6. GUN             | (f) a plane with the propeller in front of the wings.                               |
| 7. CEILING         | (g) a small operatable auxiliary wingtip or surface used to control rolling motion. |
| 8. ESCADRILLE      | (h) an automatic balancing device.  |
| 9. STALL           | (i) a lever that operates the elevating planes of a plane.                          |
| 10. AILERON        | (j) to open the throttle wide.  |
| 11. PUSHER         | (k) speed the motor intermittently.   |
| 12. TRACTOR TYPE   | (l) to skim along the water in a seaplane.  |
| 13. STABILIZER     | (m) to lose the relative speed necessary for steerageway and control.               |
| 14. FUSELAGE       | (n) to make a flight.   |
| 15. MONOPLANE TYPE | (o) a small squadron of planes.   |

Answers on page 84

BY JOSEPH C. STACEY

lons, where a younger major of British intelligence, whom we shall call Major A, seized it with inspiration.

"Gypsies," Major A told a staff meeting some weeks later, "and particularly this man they call the Wild Goose, could be the answer to a case officer's prayer."

It was, luckily, a propitious hour for off-beat operations. The date was May, 1940. The intelligence network of Britain lay trampled in the dust by advancing German armies. The Gestapo was spreading its iron tentacles over the continent; and, in order to survive, His Majesty's silent service needed new blood.

Thus it came about that one evening early in the summer of 1940, ten days after the Germans entered Paris, Jan Yoors—alias the Wild Goose—returned to his furnished room in Montmartre to find a stranger waiting for him in the dark. He was a thin, nondescript man and his proposition carried no profit and a great deal of penalty, yet Yoors accepted it like a compliment. He said he would be a British agent in occupied Western Europe.

The Wild Goose was eighteen, a slight, unaggressive youth with a tolerant view of life and a disarming visage once described accurately as "damn near baby-faced." Formal schooling had passed him by, and he had never known the gritty ways of espionage. In the six years since he had joined the gypsies, he had become one of them, and he spoke Romany, the gypsy

language, like a native nomad, in addition to four European tongues. But gypsies were outcasts, classified by the Nazis as one of the lesser breeds, destined, along with the Jews and Slavs, for slave camps and gas ovens.

Yet when the first consequences of the meeting *did* reach the Nazis, they commanded the startled attention of Himmler's Imperial Head Security Office itself.

It all began with the self-emptying boxcars.

Time and again freight trains carrying cereal grain from occupied countries arrived in Germany empty. Investigation revealed small holes drilled in the floor of the boxcars. The grain had dribbled away in transit.

"Those holes were an infuriating puzzle," Police General Oberg recalled after the war. "At all stops, the trains were guarded by our armed SS troops. The space under the wagons was too small to accommodate anyone, except perhaps a child, a skinny one, no older than twelve. But where do you look for a twelve-year-old who will swing up under a rolling wagon and hang on for a hundred miles, all the while drilling hole after hole through the floorboards?"

Before the Gestapo made any headway on that one, winter came; and with it, arrived another unexplained frustration.

Returning to their requisitioned quarters in Paris and Brussels, German officers by

the dozen found their keyholes plugged with putty. It was a tiny yet devastating annoyance, somewhat like a chafing collar or a nail through the sole of a shoe. There were endless broken doors, and—since it took weeks to replace the locks—drafty nightmares of enemy nearness for the afflicted conquerors.

Then the faucets turned against the Teutons.

In Paris, then in the Hague, then in the very center of Vienna itself, tap water took on a plaguesome yellow hue. It was immediately banned from use. Amid tense rumors of a bacteriological attack by British commandos, drinking water was laboriously carted to emergency canteens and the SS found itself giggled for shaving, while learned *Herr Professors* from Berlin sought to isolate the enemy virus.

It turned out to be not a virus at all but a species of highly concentrated dye, which had been plopped into water reservoirs with the aim of creating panic—an aim eminently accomplished.

Today, such encroachment on enemy nerves is big business and is known as psychological warfare, but in his pioneer day no one would have called the Wild Goose a "pay-warrior." Even after the amazing success of his first campaign—the "grain dribble" was brought off with the aid of rawhide-tough gypsy youngsters painstakingly trained by the Wild Goose, and the "water trick" was undertaken by him in person with a handful of female gypsy accomplices—he continued to talk about his accomplishments in the tones of an amateur sportsman.

"Gypsies did the real work. Gypsies make damn fine agents, even the kids," Yoors used to assert modestly. "They have a long tribal tradition of undercover work. Ever watch a gypsy woman read a palm? *There's* a natural-born operative for you. Gypsies don't believe in fortune-telling, you know, and much of their contempt for the *gajos*—or non-gypsies—stems from the fact that so many of the latter do. The secret of gypsy palmistry is all intelligence play—getting the *gajo* to reveal himself.

"Some gypsy sabotage techniques," he recalled with a smile, "go back five hundred years, maybe more. Why, when I was a boy, sometimes the villagers and the county constables would come down on our caravan like stampeding steers, chasing us along with pitchforks and rusty bayonets. Our women—there is, I should say, no harder creature than a gypsy girl—would turn suddenly, rear up toward heaven and spit back the most blood-curdling maledictions. Well, next day the local livestock would start turning belly-up all over the village, and by nightfall a deputation would be galloping after our caravan, imploring us tearfully to take the 'magic curse' off their town.

"The women would eventually relent, receiving the expired hogs as 'indemnity' for lifting the malediction. We used to have rip-roaring parties off those carcasses. There wasn't a thing wrong with them, of course, except that they had gobbled up the little sponge slivers, deep-fried in salt fat, that we'd scattered during the previous night. In the pig, the sponge would swell into a malicious balloon—and presto!—the 'gypsy magic' had taken hold."

While the natural resistance talents of



gypsies are admittedly high and include the ability to ignore such encumbrances as police courts, passport regulations and frontier guards—mainly because gypsies simply can't see the complications dreamed up by *gajos*—it is equally true that before the Wild Goose appeared on the scene, no one had been able to interest gypsies in any project lasting longer than a half-gallon jug of applejack. The Wild Goose, on the other hand, had even been known to involve gypsies in that most detestable of all pursuits—work.

When the German Navy began to construct submarine docks along the Pas de Calais, a dozen gypsy youths popped up from nowhere to line up for the earth-moving crew. They stayed on the job for a week, then disappeared with a grunt of relief.

Somewhat later, a half-squadron of RCAF Lancasters plunged down confidently over the camouflage nets and blew the entire works, along with Germany's top naval architect, to kingdom come.

The appreciation of His Majesty's MI for such stout services would have been unquestionably glowing if, at the same time, Yoors had not persisted in disregarding most of the cautions and counsels laid down for the benefit of working agents.

In lieu of the unobtrusive garments issued to operatives, the Wild Goose would show up sporting Regent Street lounge suits—cut, with supreme effrontery, from smuggled British woollens—custom shirts and heavy silk ties produced by the estimable old house of Knize.

"It's my gypsy upbringing," he would assert innocently. "Gypsies distrust everything drab. It reminds them of work. Even in America, gypsies ride in Cadillacs, or walk."

It turned out to be an unexpectedly shrewd thing to do. Those were the years when Europe swarmed with itinerant Nazi wheeler-dealers, gold-brick experts from a dozen satellite countries, "art buyers" for all the Party chieftains—and the thing was not to look like a fish peddler or a pharmacist; the thing was to look like Goering's cigar buyer. *That* got you around.

Whether acquired by birth or upbringing, the talent demonstrated by the Wild Goose for getting around in first-class sleepers and important-looking cars became the subject of head-shaking reports back at MI headquarters.

"He fluttered a pair of handsomely forged travel orders, and quite startlingly we were bowed aboard the German express in Berlin," a British operative who once accompanied the Wild Goose on a trip recounted incredulously. "Well, it was after seven, and the Wild Goose led the way to the dining car. When the steward popped out with, of all wartime things, a plate of roast beef, there was a general sigh of ecstasy in which I must admit I joined. There was a single critical sound: the Wild Goose was complaining about the absence of genuine Worcestershire sauce."

By 1942, fitting easily through the boulevards, gypsy camps, and black-market bars between Paris and Berlin, the Wild Goose was flying high, wide and handsome. The German Imperial Security Head Office, on the other hand, grew increasingly unhappy. It began to scent a

novel sort of undercover operation in its bailiwick. Suddenly, by one of those flukes that change the course of history, the GFP—the Gestapo's military counterpart, whose initials stood for German Secret Field Police—came up with a disturbing clue.

In October, 1942, GFP agents captured a small band of French freedom fighters and discovered that, instead of the usual 1892 *Ordonnance* turkey-leg pistols, the partisans packed German-made FG-42 automatic rifles, weapons so new that they hadn't even been issued to German troops. This made it simple to trace the stolen guns to an SS store in Southern France, and to develop leads there which established that, almost unthinkable, the three-and-a-half foot lead-sprinklers had been smuggled out of the depot and across France to a partisan hideout under the vast, billowing skirts of gypsy women.

The German security machinery zeroed in on the hundred-thousand-odd nomadic gypsies in Central Europe. They proved a thankless target.

"Investigating those vagabonds was like trying to count the feathers on a sparrow in mid-flight," complained General Oberg. Difficult to identify, even more difficult to pin down, the gypsies apparently became most difficult of all when the GFP finally grabbed them.

A 1942 report from the German *Standort* (security garrison) commandant of Arras struck a characteristic note of defeat:

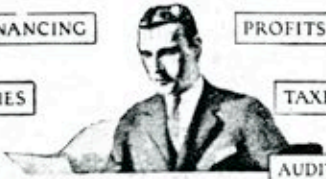
"At 4:16 p.m., one hour after the apprehension of two (above-mentioned) gypsy suspects, the *Standort* building was besieged by nine gypsy women and a troop of gypsy children whose number was estimated at over fifteen. The women claimed to be wives, mothers or sisters of the suspects and demanded their release with loud sobs, screams and supplications. When it was brought to their attention by the Deputy *Standort* Kommandant that both prisoners had registered as unmarried, the women responded only with asseverated cries, curses and offensive demonstrations.

"A large crowd gathered under the *Kommandantur* windows.

"The children aided the women by screeching, running about, and scratching in a manner which rendered physical contact with them undesirable. A gypsy boy was apprehended in the act of attending to his physical necessities under Kriminal-kommissar Haube's desk. According to Emergency Orders, the Riot Dispersal Platoon fell in to secure the *Standort* building. The women thereupon set up shrill cries of 'Rapel,' and began to tear open their dresses, thereby further enlarging the crowd, which was already sizable. In view of recent directives stressing the need for tranquility among the population, I felt it advisable to release the detained gypsies at 5:17 p.m."

In the end, nevertheless, someone talked, and on February 4, 1943, the Wild Goose was seized, while reaching—characteristically—for a glass of bootlegged Courvoisier in an Antwerp bar. After a brief and largely fruitless chat with a GFP major, he was spread-eagled on the floor and lashed on the soles of both feet until his spine felt "like a glowing poker pile-driving through the brain."

The GFP files show that the Wild Goose confessed little and revealed nothing.



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"The trouble with Germans, just as with all really enthusiastic torturers," he explained afterwards, "was that by the time they got you to where you'd have talked, they were too engrossed in their work to notice it. Then the moment passed, and you were too close to pain and blood and death to have anything left to say."

The one advantage of being a prisoner of the GFP was the guard, made up of rear-area army troops, who were known to be approachable on occasion. Since at the time of his arrest the Wild Goose's sponsors included the well-heeled American OSS as well as British intelligence, an "administrative error" was arranged with the aid of some judicious bribery. After six months in solitary confinement the Wild Goose was flung out of jail.

He was given a chance—and then a direct order—to prepare for the clandestine trip to England; but the Wild Goose refused to budge from his old hunting grounds. Back on the German's search list, he holed up in the underworld of Brussels, drinking furiously to relieve his tension.

"I went to a barber, an old gypsy friend," Yoors said once, "to get my hair dyed brown. D'you know, when the towel came off, my hair was a bilious green! Everybody laughed, but I felt sick. I felt that prison had stained me for life."

"Hell," a wartime friend recalled recently, "he was like all of them who go in there and put it all on a single turn-bull fighters, if you want, or Grand Prix drivers—when the doldrums finally get 'em. The Wild Goose had been sailing along on instinct. And he was hot. He had a sure touch, a sort of polish under pressure—and when the polish cracks. . . . Damn it all, you've seen it happen yourself."

His hair restored to a streaky chestnut, the Wild Goose left Belgium and wandered south toward Spain, trying to recapture his old, confident gypsy glide. It was August, 1943, and the German skies were darkening. The continent had been transformed into a bivouac of drawn, somber soldiery; travel was now a truly dangerous venture.

When MI in London learned that the Wild Goose had made a junket all the way to Spain and back on a mere impulse, his recall was suddenly rescinded. He was assigned instead to set up an escape route for Allied personnel across the entire length of Western Europe—all of the long, deadly trek from Germany to neutral Spain.

He was given funds which made his previous allotment look like pocket money, and he was invested with authority which made him a marshal in the braided, flagless world of the underground. He was told little about the men who had tried before him, but he soon learned about them.

About the escaping AF major, for instance, who got aboard the train in Germany, his papers fixed, his disguise perfect, and then got his thumb caught in the unfamiliar windowstrap, said, "Ouch!" loud as life, and found himself on his way back to the POW cage within an hour.

About the border guide, a calm veteran of a hundred illegal runs, who slipped into France and found himself surrounded by the green leather coats of the Gestapo before he'd gone a hundred miles—because of the lingering smell of the soap he'd used in Lisbon, real soap, the kind Germans hadn't smelled for more than a year.

And about the escape organizer, a trained agent who set up shop in Germany and was in leg-irons within a week—betrayed by some idle remark about the war which revealed that he must recently have

seen an Allied newsreel or newspaper.

"A piece of cake," the Wild Goose said aloud to his superior. To himself he said, "Just keep that in mind, my boy: a piece of cake."

Nevertheless, this time he went about it slowly and thoroughly. He set up a "shop" for printing forged travel papers in Brussels, experimented with phony Swedish passports and discarded them: "You couldn't have twenty Swedes going the same way on the same French train." He laid out a network of collection points, city hideouts or "planques," safe houses, equipment stores, a round-the-clock roster of mountain guides—all the painstaking paraphernalia that makes real escape routes so ploddingly different from the Hollywood version.

For quite a while, all went swimmingly. Between the fall of 1943 and the spring of '44 the Wild Goose guided the astonishing number of almost 400 Allied escapees out of Germany or occupied France. He began to believe it himself: it was a piece of cake.

Yet all the while the escape route—like many hard-fought achievements—was dying of its own success. The men who reached the exhilarating safety of England began to talk about their fabulous escape, and gradually the talk filtered back to German intelligence, and since it confirmed reports they had been receiving from Spain, the Germans decided to do something about it.

On March 4, 1944, the Wild Goose received a tip in Paris that his organization was in danger.

"How many chaps have we got in Paris now, waiting to go across?" he asked his resistance liaison operative.

The liaison man counted up the false French ID cards prepared in advance for the next few trips. "Nineteen," he said. "I'll take them all," said the Wild Goose.

Three of the nineteen were Americans: AF Captain Utley and a radioman named Jake, both runaways from a POW cage, and a chunky, wordless OSS operative whose name no one knew. There were two British POW fugitives—a lanky major of the Glosters and an RAF lieutenant—French resistance agents, Poles, an overwrought Canadian who broke into loud English in the Paris subway, and the former chief of the Netherlands county police.

One by one, the fugitives were picked up at their hideouts and led to a studio in Montmartre. A simulated party was in progress to account for the coming and going which preceded every departure.

"Here's a drink of Pernod," the Wild Goose told each of them, "here's a French ID card, and here's a travel document. You're now a volunteer worker from the German defense project in Montdidier. You're going home on furlough and home happens to be on the Spanish frontier. We leave at seven-thirty from the St. Lazare station. Take the second coach from the rear. Don't sit with any of your compatriots. Don't forget your false name. Don't utter a word. Don't get up from the seat till I signal you."

Next afternoon, they left the train in Tarbes, in Southern France, where the border guide was supposed to meet them.

"He was taken away last night," the man's wife told the Wild Goose.



"George, something's worrying you."



They couldn't stop now—they were in the frontier area—and they took the next bus to Lourdes, where another guide lived. There was a warning before any of them had left the coach: "Germans!"

They lurched on to Mauleon, a small Basque village perched right on the frontier. They got off in a tight knot; this was the last station.

An ancient tobacco smuggler ran a sheep farm at the southwest tip of the village.

"Take us over the mountain," urged the Wild Goose, "I'll double the money—forty thousand francs per head. If you won't, we'll stay here."

The mountaineer glared at them. If the Germans found the fugitives on his place, his wife and children would be shot, as well as every grown male in the village. Then through the still mountain air came a faint whine: the approaching exhaust of an SS motorcycle.

"Run!" shouted the Wild Goose, and the whole bunch of them stampeded for the mountainside, the shepherd leading.

Snow fell shortly before dawn.

They were ten or twelve miles above Mauleon by then. The beech trees and pebbly slopes with their isolated sheep farms and yelping dogs fell back, giving way to wintry pines and jagged limestone. They had been climbing for almost eight hours, the guide in the lead, the fugitives spread out in single file, the Wild Goose bringing up the rear.

The snow was a harmless swirl of flakes at first. Quickly it thickened into a blinding veil, and then into a furious, lung-stinging powder storm. By daybreak, Ramuncho, the guide, was blinking helplessly. The familiar terrain lay buried under a shifting, eddying, unidentifiable sea of white.

The guides had stored plenty of equipment for such crossings—alpine shoes, brandy and bacon, ski jackets—but now the Germans had it. Most of the fugitives were already in wretched condition, their unprotected ankles swollen, their trousers soggy with snow which seeped into their shoes, froze, and coated their feet with ice.

They spent the day in an abandoned goatherd's hut to avoid the patrol planes. Here they found their only food, a sack of raw chestnuts. Divided into twenty-one parts, it made a pocketful for each.

They set off again at nightfall.

"Try to go by the wind," Yoors told Ramuncho. "Keep the wind on your right. Might give you your bearings."

But the wind was shifting rapidly, whipping down the slopes at the fugitives, tracing whorls into the snow, and without the wind they were lost.

"We'll turn back," gasped a heavy-set, balding Frenchman. He tried to shout, but all he could manage was a hoarse rumble; his face was frozen and his lips and tongue swollen from eating snow. "We'll yell for help. The Germans'll find us and take us back."

"Try that," gritted one of the Poles, "and we'll kill you before you shout twice. I'll kill you," he corrected.

They spent the next day squatting in Eskimo trenches in the snow, back to back to keep from freezing.

"Don't eat the snow," Yoors warned.

"It'll dry the membranes or your throats. You'll go mad with thirst." But the warning was useless. Everyone ate snow. The fugitives had no water, not even a canteen to thaw the snow in.

On the third day, despair overcame the group.

The wind had let up, and with it the biting cold. The snow was soft now, chest-deep, and as the fugitives struggled forward, their shoes came off and they had to grovel and scrape with their hands to find them. At night, the melting crust froze and slashed their clothes. Ramuncho, in the lead, had lost both trouser legs, and bleeding gashes crisscrossed his skin. The fugitives tried to follow in the steps made by their guide, but in the dark that was almost impossible.

"My toes are going," muttered Jake, the radioman. He had lost both shoes, and dark-gray, rotting patches of frostbite were beginning to creep up on his feet.

"We'll never make it," sobbed the Dutch policeman. His bearded, ice-matted face worked wildly as he threw himself headlong into the snow. "At least, by God, I want to die here in peace!"

Today, no one can remember why, in the face of despair and utter exhaustion, the refugees kept on struggling; but they all did.

After the fourth day, their minds blurred. Coherent thought was replaced by dreams and feverish hallucinations of warm hearths and ruby pools of hot, buttered rum. Some of them grew partially snow-blinded and stumbled along with agonizingly screwed-up eyes, calling weakly to their comrades. All of them were struggling aimlessly now, sometimes crawling on all fours, sometimes hobbling along, clinging together in that animal anguish which precedes death.

The RAF lieutenant kept crying slowly, hopelessly, and the tears ran down his bloated face and hardened into icicles on his gray, frostbitten nose.

It was toward noon of the sixth day that Ramuncho ran up against a square iron obelisk protruding less than a foot above the snow. He felt it, groping incredulously, then began to sob hoarsely:

"The border! The border! Merciful Mother of God—we are in Spain!"

And so they were. Ahead of them, 3,000 feet below, framed between the Pass of Roncevaux and the 6,000-foot Pic d'Orly, lay the watershed, and beyond it the gently leveling-off plains of Pamplona, and Spain, and freedom.

Without the usual "reception committee" of British intelligence to meet them on the border, the fugitives were intercepted by Spanish gendarmes at Orbaiceta, four miles from the border, and interned. Although, contrary to expectation, the Wild Goose was the first to be released—Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had intervened for him personally with Generalissimo Franco—he was, in a sense, the only casualty of that tortuous escape.

For today, the Wild Goose no longer exists. In his place, there is once again, the proper and sedentary Jan Yoors, Mister Yoors, now a successful designer of tapestries on New York's Fifth Avenue, a boulevard which harbors elegant society from all over the world—but not another nomadic gypsy.



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