

WAR WORK PEARL HARBOUR THE USA ENTER THE WAR I AM DECLARED
 UNFIT TO BE A SOLDIER INVINCIBLE LONDON MY FAMILY'S SITUATION
 AT HOME DETERIORATES WINTER 1941 - 1942

Joining Bamag was the start of my career in the chemical industry. Bamag stands for Berlin Anhalte Maschienenbau AG. Anhalte is an industrial suburb of Berlin where one of the works of the company was located. Maschienenbau means machine-construction. They were Europe's leading construction company for nitric acid production and related plants. Before the war they had a small representative office in England headed by Mr. A.H. Manning. He was a tall, powerfully built northerner who had retained his accent. He smoked a pipe and was a shrewd businessman but also godd-hearted enough to help Jews from Bamag, Berlin, to come to England. The British Government was very interested in the technology of Bamag's nitric acid production and it is interesting to speculate how much longer the war would have lasted without having the benefit of that technology - and ironically from the enemy. Hundreds of drawings had been brought to England in the nick of time before the war had started. Mr. Korn, managing director of Bamag/Berlin, Bernard Bregmann, a Pole by origin and Hans Abel, (all Jews) knowledgeable senior manager in Berlin, came with their families. Mr. Korn was too old and had retired by the time I joined but one of his sons came to work with us. 5 or 6 contracts had been obtained from Royal Ordnance Factories (ROF) for nitric acid and other plants and a couple of orders from Australia. Most of the first plant did not reach Australia as the vessel which carried it was sunk. The nitric acid was used in the manufacture of explosives such as RDX, for use in bombs. We also built nitric acid concentration plants. These took the diluted nitric acid from the nitration processes and re-concentrated it by means of concentrated sulphuric acid. I can't remember all the sites where we built plants but Bridgewater, Whitehaven, Sellafield and Irvine were amongst them. We had the highest priority as regards travelling and over supplies of raw materials. Mr. Bregmann was a chain smoker, elderly and rather dodderly and short-sighted in the extreme. He had a terrible temper and was subject to moods in which he was quite unreasonable and stubborn; basically he was a friendly and sensitive person. Mr. Abel was I believe a Berliner and tall and paunchy. He's gait was a mixture of a flat-footed waiter and a

J. ANDYKIE

bear's shuffle but he was the most cultured of them and became a good friend of mine, helping me in many ways. We also had Mr. Wisniewski, a tall slim "Aryan" Pole, blue-eyed, with a small moustache, lively and a first class construction engineer. Some time after the war, when we built a plant in Southern France, he was killed in a plant explosion.

All the German drawings were of course in the metric system. They had to be done again using English measurements and standards. They were not simply re-drawn. We re-created the plant, improving and modernising as we went along. As a junior draughtsman I was initially concerned with details of units which fitted into a larger plant. There were about 20 draughtsmen. Our chief was George Rumble, a quiet and competent engineer. I was involved in many calculations in which my 6 months at University College proved very useful. After a while I became more confident in my work and advanced to more complicated drawings.

In practice we were a closed shop and I joined The Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen's union. (I believe it is now called the ASTM, but am not sure). The youngest draughtsman, who was about 18 and called Alan, collected every week 6^d from each of us. Part of this, I understood, went towards a fund that would pay us compensation if we were out of work. The union published small tracts of a technical nature which were useful in our work, such as standard screw sizes.

When we finished a drawing it was traced on glossy, translucent sheets by the "tracers" who were all women or girls. From these sheets the blue-prints were prepared. The blue-prints were then sent to various engineering works which made the plant parts. These were transported to the sites where we had our own construction engineers. ICI was in charge of the constructions on behalf of the ROF's which in turn came under the Ministry of Supply (MOS). The price of our plants was on a "cost-plus" formula. That meant that c. 10 % was added to the actual manufacturing costs. This covered all our office and other expenses and any balance left over was our profit. As our company was originally a German one, it came under the Government's Alien Property administration. Any profits - or losses - which accrued were held over until after the war for eventual settlement with the German owners. We occupied two or possibly three floors in Universal House at 60, Buckingham Palace Road SW1 opposite the Grosvenor Hotel of Victoria Station. It was a remarkably happy company and I believe efficient too. Contacts with top management were informal and we were aware that we were engaged in important warwork. One of the annual highlights was the Christmas party which was held in the drawing office which was by far the largest room.

Lster, when the staff has increased we used restaurants. Everybody came to these parties, mixing easily, dancing and enjoying themselves. Gradually my wage was increased and I took on more responsible tasks and after about a year got a desk instead of a drawing board.

- - -

On the 7th December 1941 the Japanese fleet attacked Pearl Harbour and sank a number of American Navy vessels. (In Singapore, owing to the time difference, it was already the 8th December. In some war histories the date is therefore given as the 8th.) On the next day the USA declared war on Japan. On 10th December the Japanese air force sunk off the East coast of Malaysia the battle ship PRINC OF WALES (35,000 tons) and the cruiser REPULSE (32,000 tons) with terrific loss of life. On Christmas day Hong Kong capitulated. These were blows which we all felt deeply. The consolation was, however, that the USA were now formally in the war. Up to then the USA had given a great deal of assistance to England in shipments of food and armament. Already on 11th March 1941 it put into effect its "Cash and Carry" policy. The essence of this was that England could purchase anything that was needed as long as it was paid for in cash and shipped in British bottoms. On 14th August 1941 THE ATLANTIC CHARTER was signed by President F.D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill on a battleship in the Atlantic, off the USA coast. In this the USA declared support for the Allies. The President had gone as far as he could short of actual belligerency for which the American public wasn't ready yet. The bad war news was deeply felt at SMH, where I spent most of my evenings. Our friends from Singapore and Malaya saw their countries threatened by Japanese occupation and the Indians and Ceylonese too began to change their views. Fighting for independence from the British was all very well but if the Allies were to lose the war Japan would be a far more oppressive master. The atrocities of the Japanese in China, where they occupied the whole of the Eastern highly populated part, were well known. SMH was a sane oasis in the midst of the turmoil where we could freely discuss the war's progress and where everybody's opinion was listened to.

- - -

Weeks before Christmas we started getting ready for the old English Nativity Play that was performed by members every year on 3 or 4 evenings just before Christmas. There were rehearsals and Mary practiced carols with the choir. Every action and gesture in the play was repeated every year, though the actors were often different. One part, that of the oldest of the three shepherd's was always played by Sandy Duff and as his friends

TWENTY-FOURTH
BIRTHDAY PARTY
OF
STUDENT MOVEMENT HOUSE

ENTERTAINMENT

1. The Dear Departed A One Act Play by
Stanley Houghton.
Actors: Miss A. Macdonald
Miss J.B. Paterson
Miss G. Philippi
J.R. Collacott
E.N. Musry
K.M. Schwitzer
2. The Highland Fling.
Danced by Pipe-Major Iain Macdonald Murray.
3. Folk Songs with Guitar.
Rosie Schul and her young ladies and gentlemen.
4. A Brains Trust
Miss M. Grieg
A.D. Duff
F.J. Einaugler
A.D.N. Fishlock
E.N. Musry
5. A Highly Topical Song
The Friday Musical Group.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY.

13th. I am in a play at Student Movement House, November 1941

Odvodní (presentační) komise

U
Odvodní (presentační) listek č. 292

1	Den odvodu (presentace)	20 MAI 1942
2	Jméno a příjmení, hod. a br. poměr	SCHWITZER MATĚJ
3	Den, rok a místo (okres) narození	12.2.1917 VÍDEŇ
4	Domovská příslušnost, místo, okres, země	MADUNICE o. HLOHOVEC
5	Bydliště	10, TAVITON ST WCI
6	mateřská řeč	slow.
7	ženat, svobodn	svob.
8	náboženství	K
9	povolání	ing. chemie
10	Zvláštní voj. výcvik a druh zbraně	
11	Výška těla v cm	179
12	Délka chodidla v cm	28
13	Lékařská klasifikace a odvodní rozhodnutí	nercholpen - nevoluen (nefit)
14	Poznámka	

Není-li jinak nařízeno, bude při nastoupení činné vojenské služby povolán svolávacím listkem.

Odvodní (presentační) listek dle tohoto listku při nastoupení vojenské činné služby jste povinen přinést.



Předseda odvodní komise:

135. The Czechoslovak army declares me unfit for military service

we knew most of the words he had to speak by heart.

Christmas dinner at SMH was a sentimental affair. Most of us had nowhere to go and sadly remembered Christmases at home. We deeply appreciated the sacrifice made by Mary and the other English people who prepared the dinner and spent the day with us rather than with their families. We helped with decorating the room a day or two before and with serving and washing up. The tables were beautifully laid and on every table was a candle stick. Afterwards we sang carols, with Mary at the grand piano, and played games. There was Christmas cake for tea.

SMH always offered an excellent programme of talks, concerts etc. Despite the war, Mary managed to continue it. A piano recital was given by Peter Stadlen early in 1942. His brother was an active member of SMH. Since 1977 Peter is chief musical critic of "The Daily Telegraph". Dr. Joseph Needham, the renowned Cambridge editor of the multi-volume History of Chinese Science, came one evening and spoke about the future of Science. Herbert Read opened an international poster exhibition. On another evening Louis Macneice read poetry. I learned a great deal about the way the English "cultural establishment" works. It corrected my view on English cultural life which I had underestimated in my letter of 3rd August 1939 to Mother (see exhibit 120).

At the 24th birthday party in November 1941 I appeared in a short play "The Dear Departed" by Stanley Houghton. See exhibit 13~~6~~.

- - -

Judy had married Olda Preč^v (who died in the summer of 1984). Both worked at Hammersmith Hospital and had a flat near Hammersmith tube station where I visited them several times. I was invited to dinner on 25th February 1942 together with a charming, elegant English girl friend of Judy's. She had recently lost her brother, an air pilot, on active service. We listened, as everybody always did, to the 9 o'clock news of the BBC. Singapore had fallen. Although not entirely unexpected in view of the news we had from that theatre of war ever since Christmas, it was nevertheless a terrible shock. Singapore had for generations been a strong bastion of the British Empire. Its fall was psychologically and strategically a terrible blow. We sat in silence. Then I ventured to say somewhat tactlessly (I forget the exact words): "Singapore is lost, will it ever come back?" But I think we had all posed in our mind the same question.

- - -

I had a job, a roof over my head and many friends, but felt restless. There seemed to be no end to the bad news from the war fronts. I worried about my parents and Anni. Jen^{ll} and other friends had been called up or had voluntee-

red to the forces, mostly for the Pioneer Corps which the British Army had created for refugees. I volunteered for the Czechoslovak forces. I was called to present myself at the recruitment centre (somewhere in or near Piccadilly) on 20th May 1942. About 20 of us stripped naked and stood in a line, shoulder to shoulder. In my hands I held two papers: my birth certificate and a letter from the MOS explaining that I was on important war work and requesting exemption. I heard my name being called by the recruiting officer and I stepped forward - and so did another fellow. The officer shouted abuse at us. I thought I had perhaps misheard. We were commanded to step back and the same performance repeated itself. Back into line again. Now came the command, Pavel Schwitzer. The other chap stepped forward. When it was my turn I handed in my two papers. Now the British Government had the overriding right of obtaining exemptions for specialists. My recruiting paper was accordingly marked "unfit" - a face-saving device. (See exhibit 135). But I was rather alarmed as I thought I must have some illness or deformity of which I was not aware; hence my rejection. I went to a doctor. He declared me fit, and only then did I grasp the reason for being declared "unfit!"

I tried once more to enter one of the war services. I forget the date when Henry Brompton and I took the tube to a recruitment centre for merchant seamen near the Elephant & Castle. There was a window on the outside wall of the office and a queue, which we joined up to it. Most of the men in front and behind us were rather rough characters and I hardly understood what they were saying. At the open window sat an official who took down details and allocated each man to a particular ship. The queue moved slowly and by arrangement with the man in front and behind we were able to slip away for a few minutes to have a cup of tea, as we had seen others do. At long last it was Henry's turn and he was taken on. The official leaned out of the window and put an arm between Henry and me and shouted: "That's all for today".

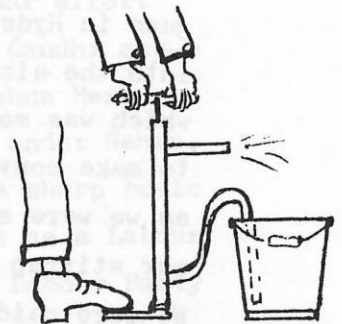
We had wanted to go together. Henry had to do some quick thinking. He could have cancelled his recruitment and we could have let the man behind me be hired. Henry decided, however, to go. He had no job and his urge to do something for the war was bigger than mine. We celebrated with a meal of bangers and mash. The next day Henry took the train to Glasgow, his fare having been paid.

About two weeks later I had a phone call from him. He had joined his ship somewhere near Glasgow. Escorted by Royal Navy vessels the merchantmen formed a convoy and sailed in the dark of night down the Firth of

of Clyde. They hadn't sailed very far when enemy action sank his ship. The crew was rescued and returned safely. He recommended me not to try the merchant navy. I gave up further efforts to join the forces. I have never had any aspirations to be a hero. Mother had persuaded me to become a chemical engineer. Did she have a presentiment that it could one day protect me from joining the forces? Would it not be against her wish to abandon my protected position? Henry was not the only one of my compatriots and friends who had no job - couldn't get a job - and were impelled to join the forces. I acquiesced in my situation.

It should not be thought, however, that London was a safe place. Bombings went on though there were periods when London was not raided. That was largely due to the increasing number of Royal Air Force fighters whose crews did a magnificent job in intercepting enemy bombers and shooting them down. More than once I watched "dogfights" in broad daylight high up in the sky between enemy and RAF aircraft. When intercepted the Germans jettisoned their deadly load indiscriminately and moments afterwards one could see a column of smoke marking the line of the enemy aircraft falling out of control. The balloons were another deterrent. They were everywhere to prevent enemy planes diving low. One balloon was anchored on the corner of Mallet Street on an empty building site where now part of Birkbeck College is. It was serviced by WRAF (Women's Royal Air Force) girls in smart blue uniforms wearing their forage caps at a chic angle. They lived in a RAF trailer on the site and on sunny days were often observed sunbathing.

Sometime in 1942 or 1943 the Germans started to drop fire bombs. They were only about 2 ft long and perhaps 2" in diameter and they came down in showers of 20, 30 or more. A few seconds after impact they exploded and burned like a Roman candle, showering hot metal fragments over a wide area, causing fires. Receiving a direct hit or being near the impact point was lethal. I became a fire-watcher at the office like any man or woman who was not a member of the Home Guard nor an Air Raid Warden and hadn't been called up. The weapon against these missiles was a great invention: the stirrup pump. I attended classes where we learned to handle these to keep at bay any conflagration until the firemen arrived. It was like an old-fashioned air pump for blowing up a car tyre. One held it down by placing one foot on the



stirrup on the ground and used both hands to operate the handle of the p[un]ger. The water was sucked from the bucket, which was always kept filled in readiness, and directed in a jet on to the exploding fire-bomb. I don't know who invented this particular piece of defence equipment but bucket manufacturers must have been pleased.

There was an alternative way of handling fire-bombs when they happened to fall on a roof: pick it up with a gloved hand and throw it down into the street. We were trained for all these eventualities in nearby Sloane Square, in a wooden hut, erected amongst the lawns and flowerbeds; the hut had two rooms, separated by a partition with a low opening. We donned tin hats and gloves; an acrid smoke was generated in one room and we had to crawl on our knees through the opening in the partition. Re-appearing on the other side, choking, coughing and dirty we ran to pick up a bucket and stirrup pump and squirt water on the smoke, pretending that we were extinguishing a German fire-bomb. Fortunately I never had to deal with a real one.

Twice a week I was on duty on the flat roof above Bamag's offices as one of a team of 4 men and 2 girls from Bamag's staff. There was a certain amount of jockeying about the rota as certain girls were considered more desirable and reliable as fire-watch partners than others. We had a warm room in the basement near the central heating boiler furnished with beds and blankets. We brought tea and coffee and spent very pleasant evenings together. We had torches and keys to all the offices and so if we wanted there was room for privacy. When the sirens blew we donned helmets and gloves and rushed onto the roof. Sometimes one got a glimpse of a plane and we tried to identify it as one of "ours" or "theirs". But one could distinguish them more readily by their drone. If an enemy plane came near the anti-aircraft guns in Hyde Park and elsewhere spewed clusters of projectiles noisily into the air tracing fiery paths. The bursting missiles showered shrapnel which was more deadly as any fire-bomb. The noise was sometimes 'great as to make conversation impossible. It was frightening at times, particularly as we were so high up. But a fire-bomb never descended on our roof and our stirrup pumps were never used.

We were paid 2/6 per night and spent it all when morning came in a posh restaurant opposite Victoria station. Two eggs, rashers of bacon, sausage, toast, butter and marmalade with tea or coffee, and all beautifully served. We were back in the office at 9 am. The first half hour at work, every day, was taken up in exchanging the latest bomb stories. One was always a bit anxious when someone hadn't turned up at the proper time.

- - -

In June 1942 Jean had an appendicitis operation.

In November 1942 SMH celebrated its Silver Jubilee. It was founded in 1917 as a memorial to students who had died in the first World War. On Saturday 14th the Silver Jubilee Dance was held in the club room. T.S. Eliot read poetry on the 18th. On Saturday 21st November was a Service of Re-dedication. It was conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. Ban It Chiu, later Bishop of Singapore, led the prayers:

"Let us bring before God the need of the world,
ever present in our thoughts, the injustice, cruelty
and fear, the suffering and despair which
is darkening the lives of so many and
let us ask God's forgiveness for the evil
which man inflicts upon his fellow men. "

It was a prayer deeply felt and shared.

After the service we had tea and there was an entertainment by SMH members. On the next day J.G. Winant, Ambassador of the USA, gave the address. He was a serious man and throughout his speech never smiled. Some time later we read in the paper that he had committed suicide.

On 17th December 1942 the queen visited us with the Princesses Elisabeth and Margaret Rose. Elisabeth, now the Queen, was then 17 years old. Both girls wore powder blue suits, matching hats and white gloves. Margaret had on white ankle socks.

As a result of events in the Far East the mood of SMH members from those parts had changed. Though there were some Indians who still saw the war as an opportunity to embarrass Britain, most supported the war effort and quite a lot were called into the Indian forces. Mahatma Gandhi supported the war but continued to press for independence. Krishna Menon, who became India's first foreign secretary after liberation under Nehru, came occasionally to SMH. He was an excellent speaker, had a sharp brain and enjoyed a good discussion. He was on St. Pancras Council as a Labour member but politically he was further left than the British Labour Party was then. His main argument in supporting Britain's war effort was that Russia was an ally. One of his first acts when in office was to annex Portuguese Goa which earned him the nickname Goa Constrictor.

Far worse was the situation of our friends from Malaya and Singapore. Their countries were occupied by the Japanese and the Chinese in particular bore the brunt of the terror. Both Ban It Chiu and Raja were born

in Malaya. These political events brought us closer together. The war was now global. When discussing the war we also devoted much time to the psychological reasons for war and the philosophies of the belligerents. A theme of increasing importance was how to re-shape the world in such a way as to prevent any recurrence of wars. We formed four discussion groups in an attempt to bring some order into our deliberations and to pass them on to posterity as written reports. This we did as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations. Each of the groups was headed by a committee and there was a co-ordinating committee as well. The groups were called: "Politics and International Order", "Physical Reconstruction", "Economics" and "Education". I shall revert to these in the next chapter.

The principal front towards the end of 1942 was in North Africa. In June of that year the British and Allied forces had capitulated to General Rommel in Tobruk. After our offensive from 23rd October to 3rd November under General Montgomery, the fortunes of war changed decisively in our favour.

It was Christmas again. The Nativity play was staged as in previous years and we had Christmas dinner in a somewhat more optimistic mood. We sang Christmas carols, Mary playing on the grand, and then we had Christmas tea.