

# Reinhold Alfred

(Alfred Reynolds, 1907-1993)

Brief biographical notes covering the period of his life until 1947

By Richard Headicar

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## Letter from Richard Headicar

Richard Headicar  
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Dear friends,

For most of us who knew Alfred Reynolds, our knowledge concerning his own "Hidden Years" spent in Budapest was, at best, rather fragmentary. Now, thanks to some loosely scattered autobiographical notes I discovered in a box of his papers, it has been possible to learn much more. In transcribing them I have taken great care over accuracy, and also to ensure that, given a number of crucial omissions, they are chronologically reliable; wherever possible exactly so.

The purpose of this enterprise is to provide a starting point for producing a more substantial work (pictorial/biographical anthology) as a long delayed but much deserved tribute to this truly remarkable man. There are more boxes to look through, which I am hoping will yield the information necessary to fill in some of the gaps and enable us to present a more comprehensive picture.

We also need contributions from those whom Alfred knew or influenced, either as friends or correspondents. These can be personal or general, approving or critical (or both), funny or sad or anything else. Additional material of a purely factual nature covering specific areas and times of his life will be most welcome.

At the back of the book we plan to print English translations of some of the poems contained in his only collection: *Reinhold Alfred: First and Last Book of Lyric Poetry*. I thought, therefore, that a fitting title for our projected publication might be: *Our First and Last Book about Reinhold Alfred*. Beneath the title the names of each contributor to the book could be printed, in alphabetical order and all sharing the same size type style, something of which I am certain Alfred would approve.

Please let us know what you think and (at last) let's get this project finished.

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## Reinhold Alfred – Brief Biographical Notes to 1947

### **Childhood**

Reinhold Alfred (Alfred Reynolds) was born in Budapest on December 13<sup>th</sup> 1907. He knew little or nothing about his parents until much later, since they spent the six years immediately following his birth travelling about Western Europe, leaving “the child” in his grandmother’s care. He had been born into a fairly wealthy family – his father (a staunch Roman Catholic) an outstanding eye surgeon, his mother from a prosperous Jewish family, renounced by them for marrying outside the faith – so there was, at least, no lack of material provision. His grandfather (an atheist) was also very rich, but his only real interest in Alfred was to ensure that his wife (a devoutly religious Jew) would not influence “the child” with the “nuisance” of her religious ideas, a promise made to Alfred’s father.

Alfred loved his grandmother and she loved her “goy”, lacking any inclination to convert him to her beliefs, her warm, forgiving nature providing his only source of love, warmth and emotional security. When his parents finally returned from their travels to collect him to live in their new flat, he suffered perhaps the greatest trauma of his early life. He was taken away, almost by force, shrilly insisting that he had no mother, only a grandmother, and no father at all . . . . .

Although unaware that he had experienced any kind of “Jewish” education, Alfred was sent by his father as a counter-measure (“just in case”) first to a denominational school and subsequently to a Dominican grammar school. Originally they had planned to send him away to an English boarding school – another case of “out of sight, out of mind” – but unfortunately (for Alfred fortunately) that became impossible due to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. At some point during his education, however, probably between his attendances at the Budapest schools, he was sent off for two years to a Viennese boarding school to learn German.

School hours in Budapest were 8 am to 1 pm, so he was grateful to his parents, in a negative sense, for their lack of attention. Although they employed a cook, he was never expected (or wanted) home for lunch. Instead he was given extra pocket money, much of which he spent on “beautiful postage stamps” and “grew up” in the street with his pals: boys and girls. There was more freedom for him in the evening, when his parents usually went out to their favourite cafe or a cinema. He read profusely, and one evening his father enquired what he was reading. “Schopenhauer,” Alfred replied. “Do you understand it?” said his father. “Of course,” boasted Alfred. For once his father laughed and walked away, calling out, “You’re an ass.” Later Alfred reflected: “Had my father been angry I would have stubbornly finished the book, but instead I thought, ‘He’s right, I am an ass’” and he put the book away. Though still only twelve, he was well aware that his father’s amused reaction was the result, not of an enlightened attitude, but of parental indifference.

A further incident occurred around the same time to which his father, once again and for whatever reason, gave an uncustomary response. Alfred had made a friend of a “very pretty”

young female, aged fifteen, who lived in the same block of flats. One day his father found him lying on top of her playing “making a child”. They were both fully clothed. Instead of the anticipated rage, his father withdrew discreetly, closing the door behind him. Later he asked if Alfred had got any pleasure from such activity. “No – but she promised me the fur collar from her coat if I did it.” As before, his father simply laughed . . . . .

Both of these incidents took place shortly after his “political awakening”. In 1916, when he was eight, he had joined with thousands of others, “shouting my head off with glowing patriotism”, in welcoming the newly crowned royal couple Karoly (Charles) IV and Zita. In 1918 he joined with more thousands calling for their deposition, rejoicing in the establishment of a Hungarian Republic and acclaiming the new leader, “Long live Mikahy Karolyi”. Four months later he was back in Freedom Square – his parents’ flat was nearby – with another huge gathering of “zealous patriots” supporting the inauguration of Bela Kun’s Communist Soviet Republic . . . . which lasted four months. The Western Allies sent in the Eastern Romanians to occupy the country.

One of the earliest actions of the new administration was the collection of all pornography and crime stories, which they placed in guarded stores along the banks of the Danube. By now almost twelve, Alfred went with some teenage companions and some adults to rummage among the books and remove the most promising titles. Spotted by the guards, they were chased away and “ran for dear life”, still tightly clutching their pilfered treasures.

The autumn of 1919 saw the last great opportunity for Alfred to display his patriotism: the arrival on horse back of Admiral Miklos Horthy, the new ruler of Hungary. As the “victory” procession marched through Freedom Square, half a million people welcomed it with wave after wave of frenzied cheering. That was the day he recognized that “the enormous crowds and I myself were the same people on all four occasions . . . . .”

## **Adolescence**

The next significant change of direction for Alfred took place when he was fifteen and became a brilliant student, passing his exams with ease. For him, puberty arrived the wrong way round, and that phase of dreamy withdrawal and sexual awakening had already passed. He succumbed instead to intellectual stimulation. Being a complete atheist and no longer feeling at all patriotic, he “shamelessly” resorted to subterfuge in order to gain approval. By pretending to be religious, he earned the respect of the priest who taught scripture; by expressing patriotic sentiments in his written work, he received a medal for the best essay. Although his scholarly capabilities far exceeded those of his classmates, his abysmal lack of sporting skills ensured that, on the playing-field at least, they were able to feel superior.

Quite naturally, alongside this newly discovered predilection for learning, Alfred was enjoying a burgeoning sexual consciousness and was doing his best to “marry” his girl friends. Yet he was also becoming increasingly aware that some of his boy friends seemed even more desirable, although it would be some time before he dared to admit this even to himself.

Towards the end of 1924, just before Alfred’s seventeenth birthday, his father died. He was a brutal, moody man who had shown no signs of affection to “the child” but hit him many times, quite often for no apparent reason. Understandably, Alfred felt little regret at the passing of such a cold, indifferent parent but, despite the lack of any warmth in their relationship, he felt deeply ashamed at the absence in himself of any kind of “appropriate”

emotion. At the same time, his mother's attitude towards her son completely changed. She was now thirsty for his affection, which he found himself unable to give her. Having adapted to a life where parental influence and interference were seldom more than peripheral, he was now placed in a position where he would need to fight against his mother's own wishes in order to preserve the comparative freedom that he had hitherto enjoyed.

At seventeen, Alfred had become very fond of some of his boy friends, something that, with a sure instinct, his mother had not failed to notice. By a variety of ruses and often even lies, she attempted to keep him away not only from all of his female friends, but also from those male friends to whom she perceived he was most close. It was a battle of wills that she had no chance of winning, since Alfred had developed a powerful personality and was a strong and influential presence in his environment. He was "indeed very fond" of some of his friends and, lacking the restraints he later developed concerning the idea of "love", he introduced a game of playing "roda roda". This entailed lying, in clothes, on top of one another and simulating the movement of coitus until they "exceeded". This became an extremely popular recreation among his boy friends, and before very long the girls were playing it as well.

One activity that remained discreetly private was personal masturbation, everyone, including Alfred, being too afraid and embarrassed to speak about it. Gradually, however, this too became a topic which some boys and even girls began to discuss with their confidant, Reinhold Alfred. All were frightened, because their parents had warned them that it would lead to "mental weakening" or even blindness. Because he had had access to his father's medical library from the age of thirteen, the "confidant" was able to reassure them that it was a practice widely enjoyed by all people – including their own parents when they were young. Whilst some of his friends owned to detecting distinct evidence of "mental weakening" in their mums and dads, not one of them, Alfred elicited, had a parent who had made themselves blind.

### ***Early Thoughts***

For whatever reason, his father had made no provision for his family, and with no income, and Alfred unable to help, they were forced to dispose of any possessions of value. By selling various objects – his mother's jewellery, the carpets, the silver ("abundant in our home"), furs and finally even the linen and tablecloths – they managed to live quite well for a year or so, but eventually nothing saleable remained. (Whether or not Alfred sacrificed that prized fur collar is a matter about which we can only speculate.) They had no choice but to leave their home, dismiss the domestic staff and use cheaper accommodation (hotels), cinemas and restaurants. Alfred, while still at school, began to earn a little money by giving extra lessons to slow learners, and after he left, worked in a bank for a low salary, which sustained them in great poverty.

Alfred considered his time at school to be "thousands of wasted hours", absorbing and retaining only the things that interested him and forgetting the rest. Most of what he was taught he regarded as of no use to him then or ever, and preferred to educate himself by reading copiously. The shortcomings of the school system and most of those by whom he was taught led him to reflect upon the nature and function of teachers and their attitude towards students. He believed that classes with "thirty pupils or even more" afforded no chance for achieving the degree of individual attention that he regarded as necessary and desirable. Most importantly, however, he concluded that the aim of the "teacher" should be to become "superfluous" to the student, rather than creating a sense of dependency: "the basic difference between a teacher and a leader".

Another subject that greatly exercised his mind was the concept of “love”, which included sexual attraction. Rather than regarding it simply as a “desire towards people with a pleasant appearance”, he newly perceived it as affinity for “the ONE who is the missing personality with whom I could live in ‘doublitude’”, an all-embracing devotion committing him to the person he “loved” (later he came to realize that “persons” would be more accurate), a gift that should be freely given without the “condition of reciprocity”. Although he had yet to overcome the “sin of jealousy”, he was aware of the direction in which he wished to move.

In addition to his thoughts about “teachers” and “love”, he was to encounter one of the most profound influences on his life: Friedrich Nietzsche. Taking a journey to Vienna by boat, which, going against the course of the Danube, took about twenty hours, he decided to take a book with him. He wanted one that he would not have to read in its entirety, but written with snippets so that he could put it down at any time. He chose *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In fact, once he found a quiet place on the ship where he could sit down, he read the whole book from cover to cover and arrived in Vienna “a new person”. The importance of that experience is best conveyed by Alfred’s own very moving words, written much later in his life:

“My devotion to Nietzsche increased with growing acquaintance throughout my life and I would not be what I am without him. I had accepted him as my “father” whom I admired and worshipped without always agreeing with him; a father whom I could contradict without being punished and a true friend in my vicissitude. That is how I feel even today.”

The following year (1926) he finished school with fairly good results, started his job at the bank, discarded many “friends” and made new ones. His main pleasure remained reading, which rapidly advanced from “copious” to “insatiable”. His main authors were: Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, Dimitry Marezhkovsky, Romain Rolland, Anatole France and, surprisingly, Gustav Meyrink, a Viennese writer of satirical novels noted for their grotesque and fantastic content, who also translated Dickens. Alfred was also extremely fond of poetry, particularly Rilke, Owen, Verlaine, Goethe and Friedrich Hölderlin.

## **University**

Despite the strong (not officially admitted) element of anti-Semitism which was rampant in Hungary, Alfred was determined to make enough money to go to university. Since he was the sole support of his mother and the salary he earned in his bank job was “a pittance”, saving the requisite amount was not easy, but somehow he managed it. Nevertheless, he was relieved that his brother (of whom, so far, I’ve learnt very little) and his uncle agreed to support his mother while he was away.

Further help came from a rich friend in Leipzig, who took him into room and paid his university fees.

Alas, his expectations of fresh intellectual challenges were not fulfilled: “the university at Leipzig was my greatest disappointment.” He felt that what little it had contributed to his thinking could have been achieved with less effort and no displacement, though he did develop a mild but critical admiration for Plato. He spent much more time in the Bierkeller once frequented by Goethe, and in the “fascinating museum”, than attending lectures. At the Gewandhaus (the concert hall), he had his first encounter with music, soon to become another great passion in his life. It was in Leipzig, also, that he had his first actual physical experience of sex, which he lamented as being “not very much in harmony with my thoughts about it”.

Nothing more yet to hand concerning his time at university but we may presume that, as usual, he had an influence on a number of his fellow students. I am guessing that the duration of his studies there was 3 years (based on a 1931 library card) but I may be wrong.

CHRONOLOGY: Left school at 18 (1926); worked in bank for 2 years (1926-1928); attended university for 3 years (1928-1931) returned to Budapest (1931).

### **Literary Pursuits**

Returning to Budapest in 1931, he resumed his job at the bank, and once more his life took a new direction. By now increasingly self-confident (possibly an uncredited by-product of university), Alfred gathered together a large number of “literary would-bes” and founded the *Haladas* (“Progress”) monthly, which developed into a duplicated magazine of fairly high standards. As it evolved it succeeded in attracting contributors who, in the future, were to establish their place in Hungarian literature: poets such as Miklos Radnoki (a good friend), Istvan Vass, Mihaly-Andras Ronai, and others. Also, possessing an excellent gramophone and some rarely heard classics, he brought together, mainly from the Academy of Music, a weekly group of promising musicians. These included pupils of Bartok and Kodaly, of whom Gyorgy Sandor became a pianist of international fame, introducing Bartok to the world.

At some point the Hungarian police (described by most historians as “semi-fascist”) demanded that *Haladas* be closed down. Alfred duly complied with their request but replaced it with another left-orientated monthly *Nevtelen Jegyzo* (“Anonymous Chronicler”). Many years later he was astonished to receive a letter from the leader of Communist Hungary’s literary life, claiming that *Nevtelen Jegyzo* was his foundation. Actually, his sole contribution to the magazine was a single poem; the real editor was a friend of Alfred’s named George Vasarhelyi. Alfred’s reaction to this outrageous claim was charitably benign, contenting himself with the comment: “. . . perhaps, in his own world, he eventually came to believe that what he claimed was true”.

Before, it too, was closed down by the intervention of the police *Nevtelen Jegyzo* survived long enough to publish, in 1932, Alfred’s first book entitled *Reinhold Alfred: First and Last Book of Lyric Poetry*. The rather enigmatic but hauntingly beautiful preface concludes:

“Let him who understands it, love it. He who does not understand it may cast it away. But he who loves it should not overestimate it; it is only lyric poetry, an art of past centuries, if perhaps also of the future. It lacks reality – the fight of present day man for survival is missing.

If you live in the past, do not overestimate it – take it and read it. But beware, because its strange beauty is opium.

Child of the future, have you already read the book which I will write in the future? Well, wait for me, until I have overtaken you, and then let us build our home, our real world together, with words, knowledge, and the restless beating of our hearts. Then, on the Sunday of our New World, on the threshold of our new home, before we turn to rest, then, and only then, take this book into your hands, and read.

Then, with love and confidence, I shall sit by your side, and together we shall whisper the miraculous words of the long dead poet, the melodies which die away in silence.

And then I shall put my arm around your shoulder, and remember.”

## ***Zionism and Communism***

Alfred’s views gradually shifted further to the left, as is demonstrated by his joining the “Somes Halair” a Zionist socialist youth organization, of which he became an ardent member. This decision was triggered by an unpleasant incident: being called a “stinking Jew” by a young man who was later to be hanged (as Arrow Cross leader) in 1945 by the new Hungarian republic. In this new activity, Alfred began to study Hebrew and participated in meetings, excursions and camps, forming friendships with many young Zionists. While the other members shunned “communism”, however, he recognized that he had taken a considerable stride towards it.

During this period Hitler came to power in Germany and the Jewish community were growing quite optimistic about the possibility of a mass departure to Palestine, knowing that his power and eventual dominance over Hungary were almost inevitable. Lively discussions, Hebrew language classes and other related activities took place – including military training – to prepare for the aliyah (return to Palestine).

Alfred’s final step leading to Marxist-Leninism and his zealous study of its “cramped ideology” came when he met Lazlo Rajk, the Hungarian Minister of Interior Affairs. From the beginning, their friendship was heavily imbued with communistic discussions, which resulted in Alfred joining the movement. As usual he threw himself into the various activities, convinced of the justice of the cause but, thankfully, without surrendering his independence of mind. Consequently, when Stalin’s “close friend” Kirov was assassinated at the end of 1934 (almost certainly on Stalin’s orders) – an event which Stalin used as an excuse for arresting almost all of Lenin’s former comrades and helpers in the revolution, most of whom were sentenced to death – Alfred began to irritate the Party by persistently asking awkward questions about the incident.

Alfred had been “filled with doubts” from the very beginning of this ruthless campaign and as his questions were not answered but “angrily rejected” by his comrades, he left the party. He also lost Rajk’s obviously opportunistic friendship. Interestingly, when occasionally speaking at meetings during the 1950s and ‘60s he sometimes used the name Alfred Rajk. Lazlo Rajk was hanged in 1949, himself a victim of still more trumped-up charges by the “people’s party”.

A number of members of the British (and other) Communist parties left over the Kirov assassination. I would love to have asked Alfred why Kirov was somehow deemed worse than Stalin’s previous atrocities. Were those considered justifiable within the context of the revolutionary objectives?

## ***Arrest***

After he left the Party, its underground newspaper, “The Communist”, printed a story accusing him of being a police spy. The article included his name and address and concluded by warning workers not to have anything to do with him. What was particularly treacherous about such a betrayal by his former comrades, was that the editors knew that their illegal publication would reach the police before Alfred himself became aware of it. When he questioned the editor, whom he knew, he was told that anything was allowed against “a traitor of the working class”. And there the matter rested.

Following these occurrences, Alfred was very cautious, abandoning any contact which would compromise either himself or those with whom he would otherwise have met in normal circumstances. During this difficult time he drew strength and courage from listening to music, developing the great passion acquired over the previous few years. He worshipped Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, Franck, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Schumann – dependable and inspiring companions who never let him down. He continued to build an enormous record library.

*At this point he highlights “Action Against Franco” as an episode to be written about in detail. So far, however, I have found nothing else about it.*

After an interval of about four months, the police finally pounced. Alfred had telephoned a young woman friend and arranged to meet her later in front of the Opera. He assumed the call must have been overheard, as when he appeared at the rendezvous he was immediately arrested and taken to Police Headquarters.

*Further frustrations in the form of another intriguing heading: “Description of Arrest and Detention”. Hopefully this may yet be found.*

### **Police Observation**

On discharge from prison, Alfred was able to read the various newspapers which were responsible for printing some ludicrous and quite vicious propaganda against him. One particularly unpleasant article (in complete contradiction of the accusation made against him in “The Communist”) described him as “a Jew boy” and claimed that he was paid by the “Soviet Union” to betray Hungary to the “Russians”. There were other similarly nonsensical allegations and he hoped in vain to find a “progressive” paper that spoke in his defence. In despair he went to the Social Democratic Party, whose General Secretary, Buchler, was the father of one of his female friends. There he heard with horror that “Sebastyen” (a fellow prison inmate? a prison visitor? a solicitor?) had appeared at Buchler’s desk the previous day and passed on all that Alfred had told him in prison.

Whatever that conversation contained it must have been quite incriminating, as Buchler was neither sympathetic nor friendly and was already keen to distance himself from Alfred. To his great credit, however, he gave Alfred a recommendation to the Labour M.P. Philip Noel-Baker and to the president of the Co-operative Party.

Upon his release from prison, the police placed Alfred under “permanent observation” and he had to report to the station every week. He was not allowed to enter cafes, restaurants, cinemas, theatres or any other public buildings or premises. He was forbidden to travel on trains, trams or buses or even to walk along a main street. Wherever he went he was obliged to use side streets or back alleys and, should he come upon a main street on his journey, he had to cross directly over it. No more than two guests were permitted in his house at anyone time and he could not enter the house of a friend who had a guest already there. Naturally, he lost his job at the bank and needed permission from the police to obtain another, consequently he remained unemployed. Placed in such intolerable and dangerous circumstances, he began to speculate about the possibility of somehow escaping from Hungary.

*Another undeveloped heading Agnes – Friendship – Engagement*

## ***Austrian Escape***

Alfred had a friend who worked in the Austrian Embassy, who came up with an excellent idea to help him escape, enquiring whether it was possible to establish any kind of Austrian connection. Alfred remembered that his father had spent two years working in Vienna and, whilst there, had written a number of letters to his (Alfred's) mother. Later, in 1918, when they had to choose which State to live in, they quite naturally chose their native country, Hungary. Even so, by claiming that his father lived in Vienna and courted his mother from there to become his wife, Alfred was able to "prove" that his father was actually an Austrian. Luckily, the relevant letters (still in their original envelopes) remained in his mother's possession and despite the fact that, quite obviously, they were not documentary evidence of his Austrian nationality, the Embassy accepted this tenuous "proof" as sufficient and gave Alfred an Austrian passport.

Six months had elapsed since he had first been placed under police supervision and he wondered how he could possibly be allowed to leave Hungary as an Austrian without having officially entered it. He decided to take a chance and try anyway. By sheer good fortune (or redeeming incompetence), the border police never even glanced at the place of issue stamped on the passport and let him pass safely into Austria.

On arrival in Vienna, his first visit was to Agnes, his fiancée, who was studying medicine at the university, though "being a Jewish girl she was not admitted because of the numerous clauses" (presumably not admitted to residence at the university). His plan was to marry her straight away and proceed together to Britain but, to his "astonishment and anger", she refused to interrupt her studies which only required one more year to complete. She promised, instead, to join him in England as soon as she had received her doctorate.

Alfred regarded her decision as "black treachery" and a breaking-off of their relationship. Much later in his life he realized that "she was right and I foolish", but at the time he felt that nothing remained to bind his future to the world that he was leaving.

*Another heading: "Visit of Agnes". No details but most likely an attempt by Agnes to restore their relationship.*

With his Austrian passport, en route to England, he travelled through Germany and visited old friends. He was delighted to discover that every one of them remained entirely unattracted to National Socialism. One, a high court judge at Leipzig, expressed relief ("thank God") that he had reached retirement age and would not have to serve in a country where Hitler could proclaim himself as the Law.

*Another note: "Description of Nazi Germany". Once again, nothing yet found except for a line clearly intended to conclude his depiction: "When I left the German border after Aachen I breathed for a time the air of what I then called freedom".*

## ***England – First Visit***

*Alfred arrived in England in 1936, probably in the spring. The only information so far concerning his first spell in the U.K. comes through a tantalizing list, briefly noting names, places and various encounters. They are reproduced below exactly as I found them. (My comments are in parentheses).*

“Immigration. (*Later observations confirm that this must have been a prolonged and troublesome process.*) Train journey. Accommodation by Lithuanian rabbi, then with orthodox family, my mistake and being thrown out. (*What kind of dreadful faux pas could possibly have necessitated such extreme action?*) Finding another room and eventually moving to Romford. Days in Romford.

“Moving into London. Tower Hill, Speakers’ corner, Mrs Young’s circle. Visiting Philip Noel-Baker, MP; and chairman of the Co-Operative Party. How I earned my living. (*Due to Alfred’s simply appalling handwriting, I originally transcribed this as “How I darned my lining”*) Occasional work at H.R.O.F.T. (*Hungarian Office for Trade, or some similar title*) My school friend VASDA. When going for leave, replacing him. Also other occasion, helping with additional work. No questions were asked about my past.

“My encounter with Edward, Albert, Roy (*or Ray*). H.O. (*Home Office*) visits and repeated demands that I should find work elsewhere. Writing letters to innumerable addresses of contacts of R.H.O.F.T. (*Here Alfred transposed the first two letters*)

“Finally got advantageous job in Beirut. Life in Beirut. Journeys to Damascus etc.

“Telegram from London. Gave up flat I was about to rent, furniture I was about to buy and leaving for England. After buying my ticket I had £14 left.”

## **England – Second Visit**

After a long journey Alfred arrived at Dover on 13th March 1938, coincidentally the very day that Hitler’s armies invaded Austria. This time his entry was easy, the telegram from the Hungarian Trade Office, together with preceding correspondence, making it clear that he was a member of the diplomatic staff. In view of Hitler’s invasion of Austria he had wondered whether his Austrian passport would be accepted by the English authorities, but he was admitted almost without questioning.

The Trade Delegate did not enquire about Alfred’s personal history, knowing him from the frequent occasions he had worked with Vasda (his former schoolmate) who was the Trade Delegate’s secretary. He was completely confident of Alfred’s personal integrity and of his suitability for the position, in the light of his previous experience. The job lasted about a year until, “one sad day” some bad news was received. The Nazi Government had forced the Hungarian Foreign Office to close down the London and Paris offices of the H.R.O.F. T. Alfred was told by his chief: ‘I am compelled, my friend, to give you a month’s notice. I was very satisfied with your work and regret to tell you that you will have to return home.’ “Not me,” answered Alfred, “I know what is coming now. Besides I would not want to go home anyhow.” The Trade Delegate laughed. “Neither would I,” he said. At the beginning of the war Alfred was still receiving pleasant letters from him – posted from America . . . .

While he was working at the Trade Office, Alfred’s fiancée, Agnes, arrived in London. She was now a doctor undergoing preliminary hospital training and had been given a letter warmly recommending her to a London hospital, where she hoped to acquire a position soon. In view of this, she suggested they marry but Alfred stubbornly refused her proposal: “I received her as a friend but made it clear that the offer does not apply anymore. I was stupidly still smarting over her earlier rejection.”

Agnes's mother also visited London and became extremely annoyed when Alfred expressed his opinion about a possible war with Germany. He explained that while he believed it "will probably be inevitable", he was deeply distressed at the prospect of "the misery and death of millions of people". Herself a strong advocate for a war as the only way of getting rid of Hitler, she misinterpreted Alfred's attitude as defeatist. Tragically, the war began almost as soon as she returned to Hungary and she did not see the end of it, perishing in a concentration camp. She would never have known that shortly after its declaration Alfred volunteered for the army as, at the time, he too "still believed in fighting fascists". Eventually he was to discover that Agnes had succeeded in escaping to Switzerland and was living in happy marriage.

### ***Army Service***

Despite volunteering promptly, Alfred was not called up until early 1940 when the conflict had become quite serious, but on starting his combat training he received rather a shock. London was bombed and the retreat from Dunkirk cast a dark shadow over England's hope of victory, but "with France, Belgium and the Netherlands all invaded and the enemy within a ferry ride from the coast – I was trained with just a wooden stick." It was only later that he found out that the army simply did not have enough rifles to supply one to every soldier, and only about a hundred tanks. Summarising the perilous military situation of those especially vulnerable months, he recalls: "Had it not been for the amazing performance of the youngsters in the RAF, so many of whom lost their lives, the German army would have had an easy chance to conquer Britain."

As it happened, Alfred could only look upon events from a "safe" distance. By "good luck and a decent commanding officer" he was tucked away in a division of the Pioneer Corps, "a part of the army that took on physically or mentally weak recruits – and foreigners." He had a clerk's job at divisional headquarters (RQMS' office) in the Cotswolds, "one of Britain's most beautiful areas." The war passed quickly and "peacefully" for him. The only time he noticed the destruction was when he went on home leave to London and saw so many houses and well known buildings in ruins. From the comparative comfort and security of his station at Miserden (Gloucestershire) he could only pity his old mother, spending her nights in air-raid shelters, whilst he enjoyed the tranquil silence of his own picturesque surroundings and slept easily on his pillow.

His weekly entertainment consisted of a "mostly lonely" excursion to a cinema in either Cheltenham or Gloucester. On leave in London, he usually divided his time between his mother and his friend Roy, who greatly helped him with mastering the English language. Sometimes, however, he spent the whole holiday with Roy, sadly watching him slowly moving towards inevitable death from a much developed tuberculosis, and trying to contribute something towards the little happiness that his friend experienced before the end came.

### ***Prelude to the De-Nazification Programmes***

Early in 1944, longing for the end of the war and "exciting" times ahead in London, Alfred was summoned there by the War Office and interviewed to assess his suitability for the Intelligence Corps. He was accepted and transferred to London for training but it was several months before he realized the reason for his move. In the meantime, an event took place which was to have an uncanny consequence for his whole life.

A few weeks prior to the invasion of Europe, Alfred, his Major and other officers from his

camp (based at Kempton Park racecourse, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex) went to London's West End to see a film entitled *Tomorrow the World*. Its hero was a Hitler Youth, steeped in Nazi propaganda and completely unaware of any different views. His parents had died in a car accident just before the war and he was taken to America by his good democratic uncle to be raised in a new environment. (The U.S.A. was not yet at war with Germany when the film was made.) Although the youth was only fourteen, his indoctrination had instilled in him a fanatical devotion to Hitler, leading to disturbing complications, and a tragic act on his part was narrowly averted. He finally began to understand the evil of his conditioning and changed completely.

On returning to the camp, the Major remarked during supper that the film was utter nonsense. He described the young people growing up in Germany as "the lost generation" and all his colleagues agreed with him. Alfred alone expressed a contrary point of view, contending that upon losing the war, the impressionable youngsters would blame Hitler for the destruction of Germany and their future. He was "laughed out of court" and everyone else retired to bed convinced that it would take two or three generations for Germany to recover from such a great trauma and so much suffering.

### ***First De-Nazification Programme***

A few days later, Alfred awoke to the news of the Normandy landings, which he greeted with "part apprehension and part relief". It was only then that he realized the purpose of his posting and understood immediately that it would bring to an end his "quiet life" training for intelligence work. Kempton Park stood as a selection, dispersal and interrogation centre for POWs (Camp No. 681) who were accommodated in its premises for a few days. A minority of prisoners, however, were retained – if they were intelligent and well informed enough to furnish information about the Wehrmacht.

Tens of thousands of German prisoners came through the camp, and the fact that a staff of German reception clerks was required gave Alfred an idea. He reminded the Major of the discussion that had taken place a few weeks earlier and requested that he be allowed to recruit a number of young Nazis for this work, in order to prove the validity of his minority opinion. The major agreed but imposed the following conditions. They must be

1. intelligent and articulate enough to express their view,
2. totally immersed in Nazi ideology,
3. proud and courageous enough to admit their "Weltanschauung" (Conviction).

Two further conditions were also agreed:

- a. That a small minority of anti-Nazis be admitted in order to verify the conclusions reached.
- b. The Major to interview everyone chosen, to satisfy himself that conditions 1-3 had been met.

The prisoners recruited as clerks were exposed to the same conditions as the others, but were granted certain privileges that suited Alfred's purpose. They had a daily delivery of English newspapers as well as a range of German papers and publications obtained via Lisbon. They were also provided with a radio enabling them to listen to broadcasts from Germany, as well as the BBC. In accordance with the agreed conditions, the team comprised sixty fanatical Nazis and five anti-Nazis, all of whom performed their allotted tasks with extreme efficiency.

Eventually, Alfred formed a small discussion group (there's a surprise!), encouraging them to freely express their opinions without any fear of reprisal. Gradually their initial mistrust dissolved and increasing numbers began to attend the circle. They became used to saying exactly what they liked and Alfred responded calmly and objectively to their contributions. He succeeded in building a reserve of confidence even amongst the most rigid of them. They were supplied with a selection of books by famous German authors who were critical of the Nazi regime (and therefore, of course, forbidden), and occasionally even allowed to watch British war films.

When the VI offensive started (shortly after D-Day), Goebbels boasted on the radio about the devastation and havoc they were wreaking: "If you could see it, you would know that the whole of London is a sea of smoke and fire." Consequently, at Alfred's request, the Major obtained a bus and two guards and took most of the clerks to London to observe (apart from a few "missing teeth") a busy, vibrant town that was populated by cheerful, resilient people but with no sign of the proclaimed "sea of fire".

Another quite different incident demonstrated how the group was slowly coming round to Alfred's point of view, recognizing that it was not at all anti-German but simply anti-Nazi. In their washroom was a basin with a notice attached saying "Please do not use this tap as it is out of order". When asked what the German equivalent would be they chuckled and replied, "Der Gebrauch dieses Wasserhahns ist strengstens verboten" (The use of this tap is strictly forbidden).

After three or four months the clerks manifested a profound change of attitude. A typical example was that of a young Waffen-SS corporal to whom Alfred (in his "infamous" room 8) had shown, during his first interrogation, a photograph of Adolph Hitler. Then the corporal had described the face in terms of glowing praise and almost adoring admiration but when it was produced again, he just laughed – clearly embarrassed, remembering his earlier response. Despite the promising effects of Alfred's methods, the Major remained unconvinced but an event occurred which made him change his mind.

In December, whilst Alfred was on leave, the camp was used to accommodate hundreds of German female nurses who had been brought over from military hospitals to be interrogated and interned. Fifty eight of 'his' group of clerks were temporarily transferred to another POW camp where, perhaps foolhardily, they boldly expressed their newly acquired outlook. The war was still on and most of the other prisoners remained fiercely loyal to Hitler, so the new arrivals were quickly condemned as "traitors". Consequently they faced persistent hostility and violence and were savagely beaten up, one of them being thrown into a canal from which he was rescued by British guards.

In view of these happenings, the C.O. decided to separate the parties concerned, and when the clerks were offered the chance to return to Kempton Park, only six "deserted" to their Nazi comrades and chose to remain with them. The rest eventually became members of the team broadcasting anti-Nazi propaganda through the BBC.

### ***Later De-Nazification Programmes***

The success of Alfred's experiment soon saw him posted to Norway, where he was involved with similar work (apparently residing in a large villa and being waited on by German officers). He continued with it in Germany, following his demobilization, where he became a

'Training Adviser' with the Foreign Office which attended to the welfare and education of POWs in Britain. His job was visiting the camps, observing the political development of the inmates, engaging the young prisoners in discussions and generally reporting on the morale in the camp. Youngsters who were then, after the war, still exposed to the Nazi propaganda of more forceful personalities were removed to a special youth camp (No.45) at Trumpington, near Cambridge. For a considerable time he held the position of Training Adviser in charge of youth camp activities.

All POW's were classified into categories: A and A+ for good anti-Nazis; B, B+ and B- for the grey borderline cases (by far the greatest number), and C and C+ for Nazis and 'dangerous' Nazis respectively. Many of the people who did the job of categorising were, through no fault of their own, unacquainted with the situation in Germany or its politics and history. They relied entirely on the impression they formed and the information provided by the prisoners. It often happened, therefore, that the most active Nazis, who knew what a 'democrat' wanted to hear, were classified A, to be sent home as soon as possible. Conversely, those who had been exposed to Hitler's propaganda throughout their formative years could only give the answers they had learned, and thus, considered Nazis, their departure was delayed until the end of Germany's occupation.

Knowing this, Alfred was anxious to rectify the situation, and at a meeting of training officers, chaired by a Scottish officer, Lt-Col. Henry Faulk, he proposed that young prisoners from Watten (camp No.165), near Wick in Scotland, an especially heavily guarded camp for 'dangerous' C+ prisoners, should be allowed to come to the youth camp to be subjected to his deprogramming work. After some opposition it was agreed that sixty prisoners be transferred for the experiment. (Sixty appears to be the optimum number for this purpose).

When Alfred entered the Nissen hut where the sixty were assembled, the prisoners (who had already heard about him) greeted him with a sustained roar of hatred and hoots of derision. He was silent for a moment, then shouted back at them (presumably in German): "Why the bloody hell do you think I am here? Because I like you? I hate your bloody guts. I am here because I get paid for it." Shouting even louder he asked: "Are you Nazis?" "Yees" they howled. "You are not!" "Yes we are!" they affirmed with deafening confidence. Waiting until their noisy response had diminished, Alfred quietly stated: "Well, I can prove that you are not!" Now commanding their curious attention he asked them: "How many points are there in the programme of the National Socialist Party?" Some called out: "Twenty five". At this crucial point, Alfred took a gamble by employing an orator's trick: "If any of you can quote more than three, I shall leave at once and admit defeat." They couldn't, which enabled him to turn the tables on them completely. "So now, you see, we shall just have to study the party programme before you can prove that you are good Nazis. What did Hitler have to say about the relation of nature and race pollution?" Nobody answered. "Oh dear, it seems that we have to read some of Hitler's writings too."

Various other questions were posed by Alfred, with similar results. He became their tutor in Nazism for the whole of the following week, after which the certainty of their conviction was less convincing. Having established contact and earned their respect, his work with them developed a more positive emphasis, with impressive results. A few weeks later he was allowed to bring another sixty youths from the C+ camp, but word of his unconventional tactics had spread and they never gave him a moment's trouble. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the sensitive and sympathetic approach that Alfred adopted to these vulnerable (if temporarily

fanatical) young victims of relentless state indoctrination is that many of them became his lifelong friends.

Typically, and with his usual clarity, he provided a sobering perspective concerning his de-nazification endeavours when he wrote in 1974, “The overwhelming majority of the young generation in Germany has, in my view, shown that they were not ‘lost’, although I readily admit that the defeat of the Nazis was the *decisive* reason why the Nazi ideology has lost its sting. But then, one of my most powerful arguments was when I asked the young men, ‘Can anyone name a party leader, gauleiter, SS-leader or top ranking Nazi bureaucrat (“Bonze”) who has lost his life fighting the enemy?’ They couldn’t. It proved to be a fatal blow to their weakening faith.”

### ***Postscript***

A few enlightened officers in other camps independently adopted a humane, engaging approach and succeeded in establishing enduring bonds with their prisoners. In Matthew Barry Sullivan’s excellent book about the de-nazification programmes, *Thresholds of Peace*, published in 1979, they are deservedly given credit. Alas, through no fault of the author, Alfred’s significant contribution seems to have been overlooked. Possibly he is (at least) mentioned in Lt-Col Faulk’s own account (written in German) *Kriegsgefangenen in Grossbritannien – Re-education*. I hope so.