

## **LUFTWAFFE.**

**By James Collins.**

**In 1962 a full 17 years after the end of World War II, New York was full of the displaced persons and veterans of WW2. In Kollsman when someone told you they were in the war, you had to ask them, "On whose side?" Kollsman had veterans from the Russian army, the French, the British, the Canadian army and obviously, the American army. From the other side of the war the company employed veterans from the Italian army and various branches of the German army including the Wehrmacht, the Luftwaffe and Panzer divisions.**

**One morning, a new employee showed up at the desk next to me with the interesting name of Bernie Bullwinkle. He had little or no accent, but was of the right age to have been in the war. We learned that his war experience was with the Luftwaffe infantry. We all assumed that the Luftwaffe, which was the German Air Force, was purely concerned with aircraft and avionics. Bernie advised us that Herman Goring, who headed up the German Air Force, was building his own empire and demanded and received authorization to form up Luftwaffe infantry. It was purportedly to be used to protect airfields and transportation of supplies to the Air Force. Unfortunately, Goring was very involved in the politics and had volunteered his infantry for some of the more brutal battles in the early part World War II. Bernie, it seems had been assigned to the battle of Leningrad where more than 1 million people were killed.**

**One day I asked Bernie, "How did you ever survive Leningrad?"**

**"I decided I had had enough. So I walked out of the battle area and walked to Denmark where I surrendered to the British forces."**

**"How did you manage to walk out? Didn't they shoot deserters? How did you get papers to get past the SS typically guarded the area behind the lines?"**

**"I knew that if I got caught I would be put up against a wall and shot. I found a dead stretcher-bearer, in the front lines, took off his armband and his helmet, put them on and picked up his stretcher. Then I just started walking, heading northeast, away from the sounds of the battle."**

**"Why didn't anyone stop you and ask for papers?"**

**"So many people were getting hit and dying every day that stretcher bearers were very common. Everyone expected a wound at any time and knew that stretcher-bearers were the only ones would run out into enemy fire to help you. Everybody loved the stretcher bearers and nobody ever bothered them."**

**"How far did you walk?"**

**"Seven hundred miles from Leningrad to Denmark, I usually walked late at night and nobody ever stopped me. Now here I am in America."**

**Bernie's story got him a lot of respect and attention. He was a recognized survivor. A couple of years later, however, somehow Bernie crossed a malevolent higher up in the organization. I never learned who it was, but I saw their plan in action.**

**Kollsman had a contract with the Navy to do submarine work on an island in Hawaii. Bernie selected as the field engineer, went to that location with a one-way ticket to handle support. The job had an open-ended schedule. Kollsman did not know when completion would occur because it depended on the arrival and departure of various submarines. These dates were secret.**

**Three weeks after Bernie started in Hawaii; New York informed him that they terminated him. Someone was getting even with Bernie for a slight, real or imagined. We learned Bernie called the office to obtain a return ticket so he could come home and that management refused to send one. All the members of the staff were aghast that company management could pull such a nasty ploy. I told them all not to worry. From my experience in dealing with Bernie and learning all he had been through, I was convinced that a man who could walk 700 miles as a deserter from the German army through the German lines to surrendered to the British was not to be held up by a transit problem in Hawaii.**

**Bernie's resilience proved itself. He returned from Hawaii, obtained a new job, and successfully sued the company for the ticket and damages. Once again, Bernie ended up on top.**

**THE END**