

The image features a hand reaching out from the bottom left, touching a strand of barbed wire. The background is a dark, monochromatic red with a subtle texture. The title is centered in the upper half of the image.

Trapped in the  
**RUSSIAN ZONE**

LORENA LEFOR GOLKE

# TRAPPED IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE

By Lorena Lefor Golke



Strategic Book Group

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# Acknowledgments



The author wishes to acknowledge **Ferdinand Golke and the Golke family** for this remarkable glimpse into the lives and trials of those who became displaced during the Second World War. Their story brings with it unparalleled insight into a significant period in history, at a time when eye witnesses to those events are passing from the scene.

The author also acknowledges the following individuals, whose vision, support, and technical insight contributed to the manuscript: Debra Gervais, Christopher Lefor, Terry Lefor, and Heather Beales.

## **Ferdinand Golke acknowledges:**

My mother **Emma Breitreutz Golke**: It was due to her high spirit and personal sacrifice that we made it to safety in the West together as a family. In spite of her personal affliction, she displayed remarkable resolve throughout our ten-year ordeal.

My sister **Herta (Golke) Holland** stood by me unconditionally as we were growing up, as well as during our trials when we were lost in a detainee camp. The steadfastness that Herta displayed was a source for which I drew strength and confidence. The fearlessness and determination Herta displayed in her youth, along with her committed support of our parents in their elder years, bears testimony to her remarkable strength of virtue and family dedication.

# About the Author



Born in Canada during the depression the author Lorena Lefor was the eldest daughter in a family of eleven children. The family budget was limited and the chores unending, but Lorena managed to find time to write short stories about real people. She drew inspiration from her mother who believed that the real story is sometimes hidden in the shadows of time. Her mother's constructive influence went a long way in developing in Lorena a passion for real stories about real people.

Lorena married at a young age and in time gave birth to five children. Following the death of her husband in 1993, Lorena pursued her writing in earnest by attending the journalism program at Conestoga College in Kitchener, Ontario, a city that was once named Berlin. At this time Lorena uncovered her own German background and became interested in other unique experiences of immigrant families who had been displaced from Europe during the Second World War. Lorena's passion for the real story continues to inspire her writings. ... Contributed.

# Foreword



Among the many experiences told by immigrant families from the 1940's, one of the most captivating accounts was that of the Golke family who found themselves in peril in Poland under the siege of WWII. Even though revisiting the pain of the past was difficult for them, my persistence and enthusiasm for the story eventually opened the way, resulting in many tales of greater significance than I had imagined. Each snippet of information they shared added to my determination to learn more about their experience and of the lives of those who had been uprooted by the boundaries of war.

“Trapped in the Russian Zone” chronicles the riveting true story of the Golke family through ten years of strife in their homeland and records their experience through the eyes of a child growing up in those troubled times. It gives a play by play account of their experience while living under occupation and their flight to safety that took them across the continent of Europe and through the Iron Curtain under unimaginable conditions and circumstances. The remarkable resourcefulness and determination of a young boy and his sister helped ensure the family's survival and adds a human touch to one of the most significant periods in history.

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## Chapter One

# Man from Volhynia



It was December 26, 1944, in the German-occupied Polish district of Warthegau in the small community of Shaten-vaulde. On January 6, 1945, I was going to face trial by court-martial. I was only fifteen and had deserted the military during the peak of the war, and the Germans had zero tolerance for deserters. To be convicted of treason against Germany meant execution without mercy. I feared that I would not see my sixteenth birthday. We had come through a good deal to remain together, but now facing uncertainty I would soon leave my home and family and this time I would be going alone. My anxiety mounted with each passing day.

A harsh winter storm had set in. Four days had passed and Ferdinand remained housebound. Each day that passed meant one day closer to the inevitable fate that awaited him. The family had already sustained immeasurable losses. Emil Golke, Ferdinand's father and Emma's husband, had not returned home since his recruitment into the German army two years before, and the family knew nothing of his whereabouts. In the past Emma had been a pillar of strength, but today she spoke with deep concern.

"Your father may not return from the war," she said, "but losing you would be more than I could bear. You must leave soon, Ferdinand, before it is too late. The children and I will join you as soon as we are able."

After five days of confinement in the cabin, the storm finally broke. The wind had died down and the sun shone

brightly in the sky. Ferdinand ventured out into the cold morning air. With only six days of freedom left before military guards would escort him to the guard post; he had no time to lose. There was one thing that Ferdinand must do. The thought of leaving his mother Emma and the children without wood for the fire in the depth of winter weighed heavily on his mind. He would sacrifice one more day to stack the wood by the cabin door. He knew that his father would expect him to.

Ferdinand could not bear the thought of disappointing his father even though his father might never return. As Ferdinand stacked the wood tightly against the wall of the cabin, the frost nipped his fingers through the frayed gloves that only partially covered his hands. An hour had passed and then two. His breath froze in the frosty air. He could endure the cold no longer. He stepped inside to warm himself by the large iron stove located in the middle of the room. Suddenly behind him the door of the cabin burst open and a man in uniform entered.

The man looked as though he had been engaged in battle. His appearance was frightful. The man's bearded face was covered with ice and snow, and the uniform he wore was tattered and torn. Fearing the man's intentions, Emma quietly waved Ferdinand from the room and sat the stranger by the fire. She offered him something to eat. He nodded his head but seemed unable to speak. He ravenously devoured what he had been given while the family waited in apprehension.

For some time the man remained silent as he sat. The heat from the iron stove melted the ice from the stranger's bearded face, and it was only then that Emma recognized him. He was Wolfgang Riece from Volhynia. Wolfgang, along with his wife Anna and their children, had lived in the same village with the Golkes back east. The Golkes had not seen the Riece family since 1939, the year that their village was evacuated.

The tale he told was frightening. "Emma," he said, "you are German and your lives are in danger. You must leave be-

fore it is too late. They are killing everyone in their tracks, and they will take no prisoners.”

As a German soldier, Wolfgang had been engaged in combat with Russian troops just a few miles to the north until the situation became hopeless. The Golke family had no knowledge of the battle that had been waging for a number of days just a short distance from their door. Wolfgang fled west toward the German border but was unaware of his location when he arrived at the Golke's. His only thought was to make it beyond the border of Germany ahead of the Russians and to warn the villagers along the way. He begged for a change of clothes before departing. He deposited his tattered uniform in the fire, grabbed the loaf that Emma had wrapped for him and left the cabin.

Looking back over his shoulder, he repeated in a commanding voice, “Don't delay! Leave now!” he urged. “They will take no prisoners,” he said as he disappeared in the same hurried manner in which he had come.

Ferdinand did not question the news. He knew being caught behind Russian lines would mean certain doom for all of them. Death by firing squad was no longer on the forefront of his mind. He thought of his mother who was defenseless against the fate that was now inevitable. He thought of his two younger sisters, Herta and Frieda, and his brother, Erich, who was not yet five. He knew in his heart that he would not abandon them. Safety now meant escaping into Germany over the Oder River. If they left now, in three days time they could reach the bridge over the Oder River ahead of the Russians.

As we prepared to leave I could not help thinking about how our lives had changed. It had been only five years since we had left Volhynia. I was just ten when we were loaded onto the boxcar in the cold of winter. Today it seemed so long ago. I had grown up, our family had changed, and my world had changed. Father had not returned from the war and if he were alive, there would

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be no hope of finding him. We would now be on the move again. Once again we would leave everything we owned except what we could carry and leave for the West.

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