



Driving ambulances to Ukraine

by Alistair Bamford

Such strange bells strike the miles in their indiscriminate tolling:
something-stadt, something-hausen, Halle (Handel, Heydrich),
Leipzig (Red Bull), Dresden (Bomber Harris); then thick-tongued
consonantal chimes of cees, zeds, vees and their brashly
diacriticked vowels, that flick and kick like disremembered
children's bricks: Oświęcim, Bytom, Jarosław, names sibilant golems
remade from determinedly forgotten memories.

The air gapes unexpectedly with a blue of cornflowers,
yellow toad flax, froths and foams of cow parsley, soft poppies
along the roadsides saying what modern poppies say –
home now boys and girls, run along and play before you are dead;
sudden sharp birdsong: blades, needles, splinters; the golden domes
are distance-diminished, distracted by another
procession of head-hung school mates, old people in black tee shirts.

Hotel, shower, food, sleep, breakfast, taxi, airport past the
red and black flags for Andrei, Bohdan, Celestin, Dmytro,
Evgeny, Fedir, Genrikh, Hennadiy, Ihor and Ivan, Jossyp,
Kyrlo, Leonid, Maksym, glued into each other's arms
Mykhailo and Nykola, Oleh, Pavlo and always Petro,
Rostyslav, the twins Stepan i Symeon, Taras,
Ustym, Viktor (they never found him), Witalij, Yuri, Zoran.

The apples at home, on my two new trees, they are like
little green balloons. Those two old kulaks with a horse and cart,
they would know the feeling: we would go into their orchard
and talk by pointing, not about Germans, Jews, Poles, Russians –
we are too far from the time for that – but about strong drink;
and we would sing too, not about Russians, Poles, Jews, Germans,
but how the apples are not hearts, and so they will not burst.