Auschwitz was 40 miles behind me. The Slovak border was 40 miles ahead. I lay on the side of a hill, my face ground into its rocks while German bullets whizzed their way around me.

It seemed like the end of my journey, the end of my plan to warn a million Hungarian Jews that they were earmarked for the gas chambers.

The end of my aim to tell the civilized world about Eichmann's secret horror camp. The end of my life.

And then there was a miracle.

A valley lay between me and the German patrols. I heard the officer shout:

"We've got him. Cease fire."

The silence was beautiful. But for a moment, I did not move. Then I hurled myself to safety behind a heap of rocks.

Fred Wietzker, my Slovak friend, was waiting. Together we dashed down the other side of the hill into the dark, friendly arms of a forest.

We plunged through the snow that was sometimes waist deep. And then we realized that we had flung away our overcoats so that we could run faster when the Germans opened fire.

SAFE

Behind us, the dogs howled and our tracks glared vividly from the snow. We stumbled on a fast-moving stream and plunged in immediately.

The icy water bit into our narrow. But gradually the barking of the dogs and the shouts of the soldiers faded. We were safe— for a while.

After that escape we kept moving for two days and two nights without water, without food. On the third day we met a Polish woman, working in the fields.

Though she knew that she and her family could be killed even for talking to us, she listened to our story. In return she said: "I shall bring a man who will help you tomorrow night."

She went away. Her 16-year-old son bought us food. And when she returned at last, she was with a man who covered us both with a blanket.

He did not speak and neither did we. Hungry we gobbled the food they had brought us and, when we had finished, his face relaxed at last.

"You're from Auschwitz, right?" he grunted. "Only men from Auschwitz could eat like that!"

He had thought we might have been Gestapo agents!

He told us he would bring us to the Slovak border the following night. Then I discovered that my feet were so swollen I could barely walk. I could not even get my boots off.

There was only one remedy. I took out the only weapon I had brought from Auschwitz—a cutthroat razor. It was my suicide blade in case I was captured.

Quickly I cut my heavy boots off. The Pole said: "You won't get far in your socks. I'll bring you my carpet slippers tomorrow. It's all I can spare."

We left the following night, with me shuffling along in his slippers. The man moved swiftly, silently.

Occasionally he stopped, glanced at his watch and said: "We must hide. If 10 minutes a German patrol will pass."

Each time he was right. We huddled deep in the bushes and heard the crunch of soldiers' feet. We could almost have touched them.

After a few days we came to a clearing. He pointed to a forest about 50 yards away and told us: "That is Slovakia. German patrols pass every three hours. Cross after the next has gone by."

And then he was gone. I did not even know his name.

We hid until we saw the gray uniforms move slowly by. Then we raced for the trees and started panting, exhaling only when we reached them.

I was back in my own country, even though it was still occupied. I was home.

TRUST

About 50 yards further on we met a peasant. Cautiously I asked him where we were and he said: "Near the village of Skalice. Not far from the town of Boden."

I knew both places. My instinct told me I could trust this man and I said quickly: "We need help. We must get to Boden."

He grinned. "My name is Casicky," he said. "You'd better come to my place because you won't get far in these clothes."

He was right. We had stolen them from the crematorium.
EYE-WITNESS of the Eichmann horror

Early in 1944, Rudolf Vrba, a young Czech Jew who was imprisoned in Auschwitz, learned that the Nazis were planning to exterminate the million Jews living in Hungary. Adolf Eichmann had already ordered the murder rate in Auschwitz to be stepped up to 10,000 a day.

Vrba determined to escape to warn the Hungarian Jewish leaders. He hid in the “outer camp” while guards searched for him, then made a break with another prisoner.

by Dr. Rudolf Vrba

made to exterminate Hungary’s Jews.

We pin pointed the exact position of the camp and all military objectives around it.

Meanwhile we were kept at Zionist headquarters. They gave us fine clothes and food—everything we wanted, in fact, including 500 crowns a week which to us was a fortune.

It was luxury, sweetened by achievement. I was certain we had saved those Hungarians.

Once they knew their fate, they would resist. And the Germans, pressed by the Russians in the East and the Anglo-Americans in the South, could not spare the men to crush them.

WORRY

But after a couple of days I began to worry. Whenever I asked for news I was told: “We have informed Dr. Kastner, the Hungarian Jewish leader, and other important Hungarian Jews. But we must avoid panic.”

And then one morning the elderly maid who brought my breakfast came in, crying.

“They are sending Hungarians to Auschwitz,” she sobbed. “Thousands of them in railway trucks. They’re passing through Zilina station.”

Practically I dashed to my hosts and began to harangue them. They tried to calm me: “Kastner knows what he is doing,” they said. “We must not panic!”

I shouted: “Men, women and children are being gassed this minute. Their bodies are smoking in the crematoria....

“Calm yourself,” they murmured. “We brought food to them at the station last night. And milk for the children.”

But nobody told them they were doomed. I realized my escape, with all its nightmare risks, could well have been in vain.

Somehow, for some reason, Kastner was pulling off the biggest double-cross in history. He was allowing his own people to be exterminated.

VILE

We met in the nearby town of Zilina on April 25. They cross-examined us for hours before they believed us. Then Fred and I sat down and dictated to Kastner a 30-page report on Auschwitz, entire extermination program.

We gave detailed statistics of the mass-murders. We described the whole vile machine. We devoted pages to the fantastic preparations which were being immediately with the leaders of the Jewish community—Dr. Oscar Neumann, spokesman for all Slovakia’s Jews. Oscar Krasnansky, Erwin Steiner and a man called Hechter.

They were very expensive and unmistakably Dutch.

He took us home, fed us and gave us pleasant clothes from his own spare wardrobe. Next day we helped him drive 10 pigs into Czech and on the way I told him I had to contact Jewish leaders.

It was April 24, 1944. I knew that the transportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz was due to start very soon.

“I know a Jewish doctor—Dr. Pollak,” he said. “I’ll take you to him when we’ve sold the pigs.”

Pollak had his surgery in the same building as the GHQ of the Slovak army. But the secretary did not even glance at us as we passed the door.

The doctor put us in touch with the leaders of the Jewish community—Dr. Oscar Neumann, spokesman for all Slovakia’s Jews. Oscar Krasnansky, Erwin Steiner and a man called Hechter.

Tomorrow: My secret meeting with the Papal Nuncio... my report is smuggled to the Vatican, to Churchill, to Roosevelt... 600,000 Hungarians are saved.