

Donald Caskie

by Gordon Whyte

*Pray for me, mother, on dear Islay's shore,
Where the songs and the seabirds drown the noises of war.
When your daydreams transport you to where I abide,
Charge God to protect me and to stand by my side.*

In June 1940 the sun split the skies
The smoke behind Paris betrayed its demise.
The Wehrmacht were tightening their grip upon France
And no force on earth could resist their advance.

I was called to the Scots Kirk just two years before,
Worlds away from the sights and the sounds of Bowmore.
There I fought learning French, of no use in my land
But in Miss Marshall's encouragement, God was guiding my hand.

We fled out of Paris, a treacherous route
Princesses by motor car, peasants by foot.
Dodging bombs, sleeping rough, being accused on the way
The kilt in my bag was my carte identité.

In Bordeaux I discovered the last ship was gone
I was told that my only chance was to head to Bayonne.
I opened my Bible in hopeless despair
And I read of Job's faithfulness and God answered my prayer.

At Bayonne I was shocked when I heard myself say
That I'd not be on board as the rest sailed away.
I'd been called as a pastor so I turned from the dock
Though my sheep were still scattered I still had a flock.

In Marseilles my new mission was given to me
'Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, set prisoners free'.
These words from Isaiah seemed ancient indeed
But the scriptures were calling me to follow his lead.

I opened the Mission for Seamen in town
And quickly it gained a particular reknown.
By day passing sailors we'd help entertain
By night passing soldiers we'd smuggle to Spain.

The men would arrive in the dark of the night
Exhausted and starving a harrowing sight.
Some had fled from Dunkirk, in shock and distress
Some escaped from the trucks and trains bound for terror
and death.

The soldiers escape route was expertly planned
There were dozen of agents in post through the land.
Patrick O'Leary was loyal and true
A leader of men and the bravest I knew.

To keep from detection he played different roles
A businessman or diplomat to further his goals.
We were each one mistaken as he proved in the end –
A doctor, a Belgian, a hero, a friend.

With treachery, one of own men betrayed
The network and locals who came to our aid.
Our agents and soldiers, French housewives and nuns
Were silenced forever by gas and by guns.

Pastor Heuzy was one who was taken and shot
He had helped many soldiers avoid being caught.
Gave his prayers and his home, gave us food from his shelf
Like the saviour he followed finally gave up himself.

Like all of the others I found myself jailed
But the efforts to prove me a spy only failed
Although questioned and threatened I confounded my foes
For I'd written my diaries in Gaelic's fair prose.

I was banished from town told that I could not stay
To Grenoble I travelled, being guided that way.
Teaching English to students to help pay my keep
I ministered faithfully to my new flock of sheep.

I would visit the soldiers help captive in Nimes
In the songs and poems of Robert Burns
I'd slip secrets and schemes
I knew that my presence would offer them hope
With the hymn books came compasses
and maps, files and rope.

The Germans were taking civilians to camps
When I raged at the city's new Italian commandant,
I appealed to his honour, to the Romans of yore
My people were returned back home and bothered no more.

I was once more arrested and flung into jail.
In this place resolve was broken and men's spirits failed
I endured days and nights hearing others in pain
I had new sheep to shepherd, God could use me again.

I was moved between prisons, in new cells I'd be hurled.
Gods' word written on my heart gave me peace in this world.
After 18 dark months of this torturous swap
I was shipped back to Paris – full circle, full stop.

The spirit was black over Paris that night
As muttering men dozed in the gloomy half light
The Prison of Fresnes was the end of the road
For hundreds of rebels, their final abode.

My comrades and I sat in cold solitude
Each man fought despair in the best way he could.
I prayed to my Saviour, one wept for his wife
One sang Annie Laurie, one took his own life.

Prepared for the worst, I lived out my last day
Being tried for my 'crimes' in the Rue de Saussaies
A traitor stood up and declared me a spy
Then twelve German judges decreed I should die.

Awaiting the guns on the firing squad
I asked for a pastor, another man of God.
The chaplain arrived, vowed that I should be spared,
And, as brothers in Christ, the Lord's Supper we shared.

I was thrown back in jail while my case was being heard.
The pastor, Hans Peters, proved true to his word.
He went to Berlin, said the verdict was wrong,
That the traitor sought riches – he had danced to their song.

Two months of uncertainty came to an end
I was pardoned and moved to a camp amongst friends.
There, with spirits to mend and with hope to renew,
I continued the ministry I'd been guided to do.

When the Allies drove tanks down the Elysian Fields
The free world rejoiced and the city bells pealed.
My work was not over – still people had needs
Bread of dough, bread of heaven, I continued to feed.

I longed to travel homeward, be with my own folk
Hear the song and the seabirds again as I woke.
I arrived back in Scotland to a welcoming throng
That mother of mine filled the heavens with song:

*Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling place shall be.*

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CD and DVD copies of the song available on request.
Email: gordonwhyte@ntlworld.com
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