

*At The Elbe*  
American Soldiers Meet Soviet Troops  
On Banks of Elbe River on April 25, 1945.



**At The Elbe – by Fred Small**

Well mister I just overheard you talking through your drink  
How the Russians lie like rugs how they've pushed us to the brink  
Now sit right here beside me I've an old man's tale to tell  
How Yanks and Reds were friends once at the Elbe.

My name is Joe Polowski I hitched up in '41  
Left my sweetheart in Chicago and I learned to fire a gun  
The fog in the Ardennes so thick you could not see your nose  
Nor the ghosts in the Belgian wood advancing through the snow.

We left our dead behind us and we scaled the Dragon's Teeth  
With screaming mimis overhead not one of us could sleep  
Some fell to the enemy some fell to the creeping cold  
And I killed a German sniper who was not fourteen years old.

When a soldier takes a hit my friend it ain't like Hollywood  
Bone and guts go flying and everywhere there's blood  
For a moment he is mystified there must be some mistake  
As it all drains out in a crimson lake.

Then April turned the weather and likewise the tide of war  
As haggard hungry Germans surrendered by the score  
And thank God for the Russians who took the battle's brunt  
And broke the back of the Wehrmacht along the eastern front.  
Then we saw a burst of lilacs and the river swift and wide  
And rest and welcome waiting for us on the other side  
And Yanks and Reds laughed out loud to be alive at the Elbe.

We caught the glint of water and upon the distant shore  
Men and trucks and horses not German and not ours  
No bridge to cross but at the dock a boat securely tied  
We blew the chain and rowed like demons for the other side.

But when we stepped up on the land oh Jesus what a sight  
Blackened bodies of civilians like driftwood piled high  
Cut down by stray artillery -- what the hell is it all for  
We knelt and cursed the cruelty and madness men call war.

Three Russians approached us, we shook hands and then embraced  
Stalingrad had traced its lines of sadness on their face  
Upon that field of corpses these weary happy men  
Swore an oath that it must never happen again.

And then we wept and cheered and spoke in languages unknown  
They poured us Russian vodka by God we drank it down  
We sang "The Volga Boatman" they sang "Tavern in the Town"  
I never kissed so many men as on that afternoon when

We saw a burst of lilacs and the river swift and wide  
And rest and welcome waiting for us on the other side  
And Yanks and Reds laughed out loud to be alive at the Elbe.

But no sooner were we stateside than the cold war headlines read  
Commies in the unions commies under every bed  
Hurrah the Nazi devil's down long live the devil Red  
And not one word about the oath we swore amongst the dead.

There are kids today who'll tell you we fought Russia in the war  
There are armchair heroes set to settle some old score  
There are profiteers and pushers primed to send young men once  
more  
To blow themselves to glory on some godforsaken shore.

So drape my coffin with the flag of the good old USA  
Let Yanks in army khaki and Reds in Russian gray  
Lower me so gently into the German clay  
And speak again the oath we swore that day when

We saw a burst of lilacs and the river swift and wide  
And rest and welcome waiting for us on the other side  
And Yanks and Reds laughed out loud to be alive at the Elbe.

At the Elbe. At the Elbe.

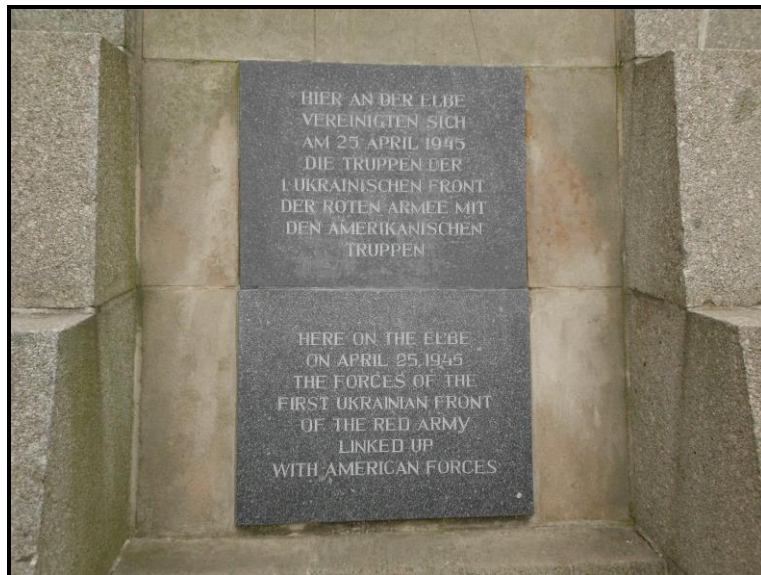
[CLICK HERE](#) to hear Fred Small's recording of "At The Elbe".



**Lilacs at the Elbe**



**Monument Commemorating The 1945 Meeting  
At Elbe River Bridge - Torgau, Germany**



Inscription on bottom of Monument



Joseph (Joe) Polowskk– 1916-1983

**Joe Polowskk** was an American soldier who with others met Soviet troops on the banks of the Elbe River on April 25, 1945 and later became an anti-war activist. He was memorialized in the Fred Small song “At The Elbe”.

When the Americans and the Soviets saw bodies of German civilians killed by stray artillery fire near the river the soldiers of both armies swore to do everything to prevent a new war.

Each year Joe commemorated the Elbe Day on the Michigan Avenue Bridge in Chicago and held a vigil. Already ill with cancer, Polowskk held his last vigil on Michigan Avenue Bridge on April 25, 1983. He died in Chicago on October 17, 1983. In his will he asked to be buried in Torgau. On November

**26, 1983, borne to his grave by Russians and Americans, Joe was buried there with military honors.**



**Joe's Wife and Son at Burial Service in Torgau**