

We were just washing the dishes of the evening meal when the voice of " Big Bill Jennings " roared out in the hall : "Pay attention everybody, the Germans have just given us an hour's notice to prepare to evacuate the camp. Take a couple of blankets, a couple of pairs of socks and all the food you can carry." "Now we are going to march but I dont know how long it's going to take nor where we're going so dont bother me with questions, I'm going to be too damn busy to answer them anyway."

The hut was deathly still for about two seconds and then bedlam started to break loose, first of all it was just the lockers being thrown open but soon it rose to a terrific pitch as the fellows started to rush around from room to room collecting things they had lent and shouting instructions and advice to anyone in general. Later when everyone was more or less ready there was a lull but not for long; every one seemed to remember at the same time that they wouldn't be back, so the pent up hatred of years in prison was poured out by smashing every thing in sight that was German. Chairs, tables, beds and lockers were reduced to kindling. The stoves were demolished and the windows and straw mattresses kicked to bits. To add to the confusion some fellows who didn't seem to have anything better to do were spreading the wildest of rumours around the camp the worst of which, as it turned out, was that the Russians had crossed the Oder River and were only a few miles away. One hut hearing this figured they would defy the Germans and proceeded to barricade themselves in. They were only stoped by the Senior British Officer himself issuing them a direct order and telling them that there was no truth to the rumour.

70 Meanwhile our authorities were stalling for time with the Germans hoping that something would break our way as it was known that the Russians had broken through fairly close but there was no definite news about them even from our own secret radio which was trying to pick up something ~~which would~~ indicate whether or not they were heading in our direction.

Despite all our authorities could do the Germans got us on the move by two a.m. We first filed past the Red Cross Parcel store where a parcel was thrown to each Prisoner from one of the windows. Around the store was left great heaps of food thrown there by Prisoners who were already too loaded up to take more than the chocolate out of their parcels, a food too valuable to leave behind.

We headed out of the camp in the face of a fair blizzard and the temperature about zero. The march started out due south and for a while the sides of the road was littered with discarded food jettisoned by overloaded Prisoners which, despite the time of the morning was being salvaged by about thirty German women who seemed to appear from nowhere. Further along the women were replaced

by German soldiers who appeared just as mysteriously.

Never again will be seen such a rag - taggle looking outfit as P.O.W's on the march. Coats of all shapes sizes and nationality were worn, a hat was anything that would keep the head warm, and pants were worn one, two, or three pair at a time. Packs were anything that would hold a mans necessities, some of the oddest ones being an old pair of trousers with the pant legs filled up and one leg thrown over each shoulder, or a blanket with its corners tied together and either carried or dragged behind. A few far sighted people had made sleds and though many broke down on the trip their number increased as time went on.

Sagan (Stalag Luft 3) Was divided into six compounds, East, Center, North, South and West Camps and Belaria (which was about 4 or 5 Miles from the other five camps.) The South Camp led the way off followed in order by the West, North, Center, East and Belaria bringing up the rear.

Our camp (North) started through the gate at 2:10 a.m. on the 28th of January 1945, and headed due south. In an hour or so we left the protection of the pine forests in the vicinity of the camp and began to feel the full force of a biting wind. Our first stop was a short one (thank god) on an exposed bridge over the Berlin Breslau autobahn. The next stop was in the open square of a town called Freiwaldau. The weather by this time was very cold and all around the square and in the doorways could be seen groups of Prisoners huddled together for warmth and a few had small fires going trying to heat enough water to have something hot to drink. The German women in this town were fairly hospitable and tried to bring us some hot water (for a price, of course). However the guards were feeling pretty mean at the time so very little got to the Prisoners unless a guard was bribed or caught off guard.

At first it was thought that we were going to spend the night in the square but after a stay of three hours we moved off south again. As we left town we passed the South and West camps (U.S.A.A.F.) who had joined up and were prepared to spend the night in the open by the side of the road. They were sleeping four together for warmth but despite that it was found out later that four froze to death, one had to have both legs amputated and many suffered from various degrees of frost bite. We marched about four miles farther to our billets which turned out to be barns in a small village. While waiting my turn to be billeted, it had turned so cold (well below zero) that my soaked shoes froze solid and I had great difficulty in eventually getting them off, only to find that my socks were frozen to my feet so I had to let them thaw off. The barn I was in had 600 in it and the confusion was unbelievable as they all tried to find a place to lay down with no lights and a strange barn. The rest of our fellows were no better off. That was the coldest night I have ever spent or wish to spend in my life. Up to this point we had covered about twenty four miles.

The worst part of the marsh was that there never seemed to be an opportunity to get warm. Either the stops were too long or they were in a place where it was forbidden to light a fire or there was no wood available. However I guess everyone contrived to make a hot drink once a day, sometimes by boiling snow. However as time went on every one thought out some way or another of bettering their condition. the smartest system was to organize into parties of about six with two fellows who could speak German included. Then when it came time to rest the two German speakers would evade the guards and do some bartering with the German civilians the exchanges usually being chocolate, coffee and cigarettes for sausage or bread (usually black bread). There were times though when bartering was unnecessary such as the time when the column passed a flock of geese being driven along the road. Thirteen geese disappeared as the Prisoners (or geese) seemed to get mixed up. The geese reappeared for a very short time when we were billeted for the night. That same evening there was a case of adding insult to injury when a pig from the farm that we were billeted strayed into a hammer one of the boys just happened to be using at the time and was accidentally killed. Well they though it would be rather a pity to let it spoil and so they cut it up and bribed the farmers wife to cook it for them. That was the last good meal I had for over two months.

The next morning I knew from the aches and pains that I wasn't going to carry my pack another 24 miles so I snooped around until I found a large hand barrow used for carrying sides of beef. My roommates and I soon converted it into the best sled on the road, and big enough to carry all our belongings. Another good feature was that it could be pulled by only three at a time so with six of us we were able to more or less enjoy ourselves for half the time. While we were doing this three fellows put on the most magnificent show ever witnessed by prisoners. They had been trying for sometime without success to bribe some milk out of four German girls milking the cows. The more they looked at the milk the more they wanted it. There was a quick conference and suddenly three Prisoners seemed to go stark raving mad. Even some of our own crowd were fooled. One of them moaning to himself swung up on the nearest cow and ran down the whole row jumping from one back to the next, he then swung up into the loft and began throwing down bales of hay on top of the cattle. The second one snarling and moaning was aimlessly wandering around kicking over buckets and milk cans (empty) and throwing harnesses, buckets, milk stools and anything else he could lay his hands on, The other fellow had a big meat cleaver in his hand and while swinging it around in a suggestive sort of way was slowly shuffling toward the four girls who, by this time, were huddled together in the middle of the two rows of cattle half frightened to death. However when the fellow with the meat cleaver began

to get too close they broke and ran screaming out the door. The whole thing only lasted about two minutes and needless to say there was milk for everyone. We finally got started about nine o'clock with the farmer and most of the German guards watching like hawks to see that nothing had been requisitioned, at a rough estimate though I think almost everyone left a little richer than they had been the night before.

We turned west soon after we started, three of us pulling for one and a half kilometers then just walking for the same distance while the other three pulled. This was very easy to calculate since the Germans put up a small concrete post every tenth of a kilometer. Our first stop was for lunch at PIEBUS where we only stayed for about a half an hour the weather still being too cold to have longer stops. The rest of the day went by with very little to break the monotony. We marched through a small place called HERMSDORF where the people seemed quite friendly however we passed through without stopping and arrived at MUSKAU where we were to spend the night. We stopped on the outskirts of the town in the sub zero weather while the Germans started there usual inefficient flapping around to find us some place to stay for the night. After standing there for about an hour and a half they started us off in batches - so many here and so many there. As it turned out I was with the unlucky bunch who went to the French Commando camp which was supposed to be only a little way down the road but turned out to be a little over five miles away, half of which was over a mere track through the woods which was knee deep in snow and hadn't been used all winter. Around 200 were sent and everyone arrived in an exhausted condition having covered 30 odd miles then having to do an un expected 5 miles on top of that put us all on our knees. The camp didn't interest me much that first night. I just crawled across the floor to the nearest vacant space and despite the millions of fleas that always seem to abound in French camps, I got the best sleep of my life. They tell me that we arrived at ten o'clock but I couldn't have cared less. We arrived on the outskirts of MUSKAU at six thirty.

We stayed in the camp for three days. The "kind - Hearted" Germans said it was because we needed a rest which was just an excuse to cover up the fact that they didn't know where to send us next. I had visions of marching around Germany in ever diminishing circles until the end of the war.

The fourth day I found that damp feet and too much walking had given me a bad case of Athlete's Foot so I went to the badly overworked French doctor who cut my foot open, Doused it with sulphamamide powder and bandaged it up. This rendered me unfit for marching so I was shifted down to MUSKAU by cart where the rest of the "non - marchers" were concentrated along with about 1000 more fellows who were billeted there. This "billet" was the finest thing that anyone had struck so far and from what we ran up against later

I wouldn't have minded spending the rest of the war in the same spot. It was the stables of the estate of Graf von Arnheim who was reputed to be the third richest man in Germany. I arrived just as the main body was preparing to leave. This was nine o'clock in the evening and with the pitch black night outside the whole place was a shambles. Of course there was no fence around the camp and around 100 of the fellows were up town bartering the famous Herman Goering paratroopers out of their eye teeth. The town of MUSKAU was in as much of a shambles as the Baron's place since it was only twenty miles behind the East front and was crowded with troops coming and going and a great many more who didn't know whether they were going or coming. Then to keep things from becoming too quiet there were quite a mob of kraut officers spread through the mess screaming orders to everyone and screaming insults at each other. The streets were cluttered with wagons, trucks, cars, bicycles and babybuggies jamming the roads both ways as troops moved up and troops and refugees moved back and displaced people, prisoners of war, civilians and soldiers moved in and out. No one seemed to know what was going on and while it was going on our fellows were reaping a terrific harvest in bartering, in fact the pace got so hot and fast that late in the evening the Germans were selling some of our own stuff back to us and of course we being the plutocratic English and Americans we had to keep our reputation up and take a very fat profit on all transactions.

The Germans in charge of the prisoners, by sending search parties into town, eventually rounded up most of the strays and got them on the way to SPREMBERG where there was supposed to be a train to take us the rest of the way to our destination. where that was no one seemed to know, including the Germans.

Most of the sick left behind were frostbite and dysentery cases, the latter I felt very sorry for in a superior sort of a way but not for long, I got it myself that night and after doing a long cold trip across the courtyard in only a pair of "long john's" about fifteen times I wasn't feeling very damn superior.

The next morning I was out at dawn, not having had much sleep, and was very surprised to find no guards around so having nothing else to do I wandered through the park to the "Baron's" 65 room shack to look the place over. The Chateau was a magnificent building in a beautiful setting. It was four stories high with many turrets, dormer windows and carved friezes. It was constructed of red brick with a slate roof and was of square design in the middle with a large round turret on each corner and two wings on either side. Behind the Chateau was a tree and vine fringed lake that came right up against the foundations and to the left was a stream that fell over one waterfall after another down from the lake past the stables and was spanned here and there by small stone bridges. The front of the Chateau was a natural park and the approach was made up a long curved drive which formed a U around the edge of the park. As you approached the

entrance the drive rose above the park on to a stone embankment and a long wide marble stair flanked by two large stone lions led up to the Chateau. While I was standing there gawking around like some dumb tourist a very heavily accented but pleasant feminine voice said, "Do you like it?" I whirled around with that guilty feeling of being caught in the wrong place and was confronted by a very attractive young lady of about twenty six who turned out to be the Baroness von Arnheim which surprised me no end as I had already seen the Baron and he was at least sixty. I wonder why she married him ??? We talked about various things including who was going to win the war. The Baroness frankly admitted that the Germans were beaten and would quit very soon, in fact she was so pessimistic that my morale was raised considerably. She was, I believe, honestly concerned about the treatment we were getting especially when she found out that we were all officers. The Baron had gone out of his way to make everyone's stay as comfortable as possible and had ordered his carpentry shop to turn out as many sleighs and wagons as they could in the preceding few days so that the fellows wouldn't have to carry their belongings on their backs. Many said that it was because the war was catching up with him and he wanted to make amends. However I watched his big soup kitchen working and no discrimination was made between displaced persons, imported slave workers and German refugees, all stood in the same long line and were given the same amount from the same containers.

We wandered around till late afternoon and for awhile it began to look as though the eighty odd of us left behind as sick had been forgotten. But no such luck, a big truck and trailer showed up. We hung around for another half an hour wondering what the delay was when an ambulance appeared with two stretcher cases in it that had been unceremoniously kicked out of the local hospital which surprisingly enough was run by Hungarians, and I want it to be made clear that it was the Hungarians that booted them out. As far as the Germans were concerned they could have stayed there if the Hungarian doctor in charge had said they were unfit to travel. One of the boys, an Englishman, was still under the anesthetic from his fourth major operation for blood poisoning in the last two days. The other one an American was in swell shape by comparison. He had had just a small operation amputating his right leg just above the knee and that had taken place a whole twenty four hours ago. Oh yes they were fit to travel all right.

Well they squeezed the eighty odd of us on the truck and trailer and that damn sardine tin was really chummy when you consider that half the truck was left free to lay out the two boys from hospital. That was some ride; before it was finished I had a pretty good vocabulary of all the swear words in existence mostly from the American with the amputation who was quite a linguist. He'd run through everything he knew in English and then give it to them in German and French with

a particular enlightening burst whenever the truck hit a bump. On the way we passed the Americans from the Center Camp and were greeted with catcalls and some pretty rude remarks which we were too sick to reply to except for the Yank with the amputation who leaned right into them in no mean fashion. Every time I looked at that guy I almost prayed he would pass out because he was just swearing to keep from screaming.

We pulled into an enormous German troops camp at SPREMBERG where we were unloaded into a very large steel and concrete garage and gymnasium combined. We stayed there for a couple of hours while they moved the prisoners out who were spread around the camp in similar garages. For a while it looked as though they were going to forget us again but around four o'clock a large truck pulled up in front and we were ordered on. The doctor had finally been located and from there on the two boys who were really in a bad way had a little better time of it. The truck took us down to the railway station and we were loaded into cattle trucks which were the usual French kind with "40 Hommes ou 8 cheveaux" written on the side. We were lucky, the sick I mean, the Germans only put 45 of us in each truck. The rest of the rabble were between 55 and 60 to a truck. Still when we gave up one third of our truck to the Doc and the two sick boys we did a fairly good imitation of a sardine can ourselves.

The trip took two and a half days to go about 90 miles so we weren't exactly breaking any speed records in fact several guys claim it was at least two weeks before they finally opened the doors, however their estimates can be considered a little far fetched considering that they had never had the pleasure of traveling by box car before and also the fact that all of them had dysentery. One notable event of the trip was that the German Foreign Office sent a delegation to the train the second day to see if we were comfortable???? This of course made us feel better in the fact that when the Foreign Office starts worrying about a bunch of prisoners the Germans must be beginning to see just who was winning the war.

We detrained in the late evening at LUCKENWALDE and the sick (really sick by this time) were again loaded on trucks and taken to the camp STALAG IIIA while the rest of the mob walked as usual. There the Doc really put the heat on about us saying that we must have medical treatment however after quite a lot of threats including a rather mild one of having every German in the place shot at the end of the war he did manage to have the two bad ones and a few others removed to the hospital. The rest of us were jammed into a barrack block and eventually there were over 600 of us in our room. The Germans searched us individually and it took all night for some in addition to which they spent most of it outside in the pouring rain.

The barrack blocks were about the dirtiest things that I had ever had the displeasure to live in. The dirt of course was cleaned up but the fleas, lice and crabs were the toughest that anyone had ever encountered being a cross-breed of every

nation in Europe and had also in the course of their existence defied the methods of all these nationals to exterminate them although I think some didn't try very hard. The bunks were in three tiers in blocks of twelve and looked as though they had been erected in the Franco-Prussian War. There were approximately 220 in a block 32'x 96'. Maybe one chair per ten men and four tables for the block. The washing facilities were shower taps hung over a stone trough just high enough to get you soaked all over when washing your hands and face and just low enough to prevent you from taking a shower. The lavatories were primitive and nauseating to say the least and the cooking facilities were nonexistent. Otherwise it wasn't too bad.

In three days time I managed to get rid of the diarrhea and promptly got the flu and in two days time, which incidentally takes me to the 9th of February 1945, seemed to be getting over it since I felt like eating again and when a prisoner doesn't feel like eating man he's sick. I managed to get out a bit that day and have a look around. Stalag IIIA had 40,000 prisoners as permanent residents and another 70,000 odd prisoners attached who were out on working parties. There was a Norwegian officers compound to our north with 1500 Norwegians in it mainly army officers including General Ruge Norwegian Home Forces C. in C. to our East was a large compound containing several thousand British Air Force N.C.O.s 1500 Irish Guards and many more British soldiers from various units. To the north of this compound were American US Army and USAAF N.C.O.s and north of them was the Russian Compound with 2000 Russians, both officers and men mixed North of the Norwegians were Serbian and French compounds in that order while south of us were more American N.C.O.s living in appalling conditions in unheated tents. The cooler, hospital and German quarters were to our south.

I stayed up two days and then gave up the ghost again this time with a temperature of $103\frac{1}{2}$, it was the flu incidentally. By the 15th, I was on the way to recovery again but began to get attacks of sinus trouble these lasted for about a week and then I was booted out of sick quarters to make way for more pressing cases. I went over and joined my Irish friend and our mutual American friend Lee Usher. The three of us worked together as a mess and took turns trying to think up some new menu using bread flour, black bread, sugar, and a small bit of margarine, which was almost our total food at that time. One day someone discovered that the flour, sugar, and margarine made a pretty fair pancake so for about a week almost everyone in camp ate pancakes by that time the pancakes seemed to lose most of their attraction and by the end of the next week everyone was heartily sick of the things so the next change was to bake the stuff into a pretty poor cake which was quickly beginning to pall when the Norwegian Officers in the next compound offered to give us half their parcels for one week which was the most generous gesture that I saw during my whole stay in prison camp as the Norwegians had only one parcel for two weeks and it was pretty doubtful whether they would get any more at that stage of the war. That one fifth of a parcel (which is the way it worked out in our camp)

Billy Thallon's letter, in part, to Dad.

As you will see, I have continued as if Bob was writing the story and I have tried to put in the things that he would have wanted. We spent most of our time together there, so I have just told you the story of what happened to both of us.

For your information, when I found that Bob was missing, I guessed that he had got a lift home, so I started walking the next day and arrived at the American lines only two days behind him. He was rather worried about coming out of Germany without me and put off telling Maureen (Billie's wife) that he was back, as he didn't know what to say about me.

Anyway I arrived in Ireland the day before he came over to explain what had happened. We were all terribly glad to see him. Maureen and I were out when he arrived at Mrs. Fegan's house and I can tell you quite frankly that he wept when Mrs. Fegan welcomed him back. You see, she was the first person that he knew, who welcomed him and he had been back over a week by that time. He told her that he had seen a lot of ex-prisoners (we were easy to recognize) arriving in Belfast by the same train that he travelled on. The majority of them were welcomed by friends and relatives and evidently it was only then that he realized that there had been nobody glad to see him back.

We should have liked him to stay with us longer, but he wanted to get over to England to arrange his passage back to Canada. We were all sorry to see him leave and my friends over here still talk about him. I never had a friend like him before and I'm sure I'll never have one like him again.

Billy,

caused one heck of a 'storm in a tea-cup'. These parcels were to be devided amongst approximately 2,000 British and American officers, however, being officers our men had to come first. We were all hungry, in fact not quite starving, which means that your conscience disappears. Consequently we were inclined to feel that one fifth of a parcel for each of the officers was much better than wasting them at one thirtieth of a parcel to each of the men, all 12,000 of them.

We were most thankful, therefore, when General Ruge, the Commander-in-Chief of the Norwegian Army and incidentally the Senior Allied Officer, stopped all the arguments by stating that the parcels had been given to the British and American Officers by his officers and that they would be eaten by the British and American officers or not at all. I feel ashamed at the thought of it now, but officers get just as hungry as the men and hunger gives you a one track mind.

Our three fifths of a parcel worked out at 20 ozs of sugar, cheese and bacon sausage; 10 ozs each of butter kackebret and pork, half a tin of sardines and half a tablet of soap. This lasted the three of us, who were massing as a syndicate, for over ten days and it was surprising how excellent the food tasted. Lee Usher managed to get a job in the camp kitchen and made some contacts among the Norwegians, as a result of which, we were able to do some trading. Bill Thallon and Lee Usher had brought along a fair amount of spare clothing on their sled and, as it was beginning to get a bit warmer, this was used to buy some bread, sugar and oats (we feared that some horse was going short of a feed as the oats were never meant for human consumption).

Our cigarette position was fairly good, especially as Lee Usher didn't smoke, so we traded some cigarettes for a tin of Horlick's Malted Milk Powder, which meant that we had something decent to drink occasionally, instead of the awful German Mint tea that we got about twice a week. Towards the end of February cigarettes began to get short around the camp, though Bill and I had about 800 left between us, about three weeks supply. I should say here and now that there was a very large store in the town of Luckenwalde, where all the lost parcels were sorted out and sent on to their rightful owners. Owing to the rapid advance of the Allied Armies, there were rumoured to be about 60,000 of these parcels lying there at this time, however, we were only allowed to send down a small party once a week to sort them out.

There were some 14,000 British and American personnel in the camp, they had all just recently been moved there, in one hell of a hurry, and were spread over several different compounds. You can probably imagine how difficult it was to find parcels that belonged to our blokes, so you will not be surprised that only 104 parcels were found for their owners in three weeks and believe it or not, I was one of the lucky ones. I got 1,000 Sweet Caporals and if I had sold them at the camp price I should have got 500 dollars, however, I felt if they were worth that much to other people then they were worth that much to Bill and I.

By the beginning of February we were down to the bare German rations and they were very bare. To be quite truthfull, we were slightly better off than most people as we had some powdered milk, a very little sugar and some coffee powder. Our rations at this time and for the next month were to consist of two thin slices of bread, one decent sized potato, a bowl of soup (less than 1/2 litre) and a very erratic issue of ersatz margerine and jam per man per day. We had been hungry before, but never like this. What made it so hard to take was the filth and the overcrowding and last and worst of all, the fact that the Russians were about fifty miles to our East and the American about sixty to the West. Weak and all as we were, we could have walked to the American lines inside a couple of days, the Germans were beaten and there was no point to our starving no matter how we looked at it.

Around this time, about twice a week we used to see the Frenchmen collecting their Canadian Red Cross Pacels, they still had enough for an issue of one quarter of a parcel apiece. Did

they offer to help us, like hell they did. Apart from their Red Cross parcels, these so and so's were working for the Germans and getting better rations than us apart from what they could scrounge outside the wire.

It must be remembered that all this time we were receiving our news bulletins from our hidden radios, so that we were far more up to date about the position of the war than were our guards. This led to a real tragedy later on.

Early in March some of the lads in our block found that they had lice on their clothes, so something had to be done. It may seem strange that we had not become lousy before, but one thing everyone had practiced was bodily cleanliness. We had no heat in the blocks, no hot water in the ablutions (such as they were) and we found it terribly hard to keep warm, nevertheless, I suppose that at least 90% of us stripped to the waist and washed every day and did our feet at least every other day. About 70% of us had a cold shower under a running tap once per week and we also endeavoured to keep our clothes clean. We weren't heroes to do it, we just wanted to be able to go out and enjoy ourselves as soon as we were freed, no hospitalization for us if we could help it.

The Germans had a de-louser inside the camp, so the Senior British Officer organized a de-lousing party for the whole of our block. We started off at eleven o'clock and got back at five o'clock, the showers were tepid (they should have been boiling hot) and the ovens, where we baked our clothes, were only just hot. Talk about organization, they didn't have a clue. One thing we did notice in the showers was the way everyone was beginning to appear nobbly, you could count our ribs quite easily and all our joints appeared to be slightly swollen. I think we had just lost so much flesh that it made us appear that way.

Everybody was spending as much time on their beds as possible now, but even then we were all very tied, our limbs felt rubbery and any sort of a rapid movement or exertion made us feel dizzy. As we had no food we were normally in bed by ten thirty and didn't get up until about 9 o'clock in the morning, even that didn't help very much as the beds were so darned uncomfortable.

I must take you back to the night we arrived at Luckenwalde, as I was one of the sic. I managed to get into the camp before the rain really started lashing down. The majority of the other lads had reached the gate, where there was some holdup that lasted about half an hour, just long enough for the air raid sirens to go and for all the lights to go out. You must remember that this camp was only about thirty miles due south of Berlin, anyway the Mosquitoes ~~that~~ were having a quiet bash at Berlin that night with 4,000 pounders (block-busters). That was at approximately seven thirty at night, well, for a solid month, every night about seven thirty, over they came and out went our light. Our enthusiasm for the first few nights was high, we could really here the stuff go down, but after the first week or so we began to get a little annoyed.

My bunk was at the top of a three-tiered abortion of twelve beds, if you wanted to sit down, you sat or lay on your bunk. During the day what little kit we had was left on our bunks. Our normal procedure was to have a hot drink about 9.30 or 10.00 o'clock, it helped to fool our tummies and let us get to sleep. Well, every blasted night our lights went out about 7.00 o'clock, when the Mosquitoes started operating, we had no lamps and weren't allowed to use them anyway as we had no blackout. What a job we had trying to get to bed. In the long run we all hung a blanket over the windows and made ourselves speize-fat lamps, these smoke like the devil and with using blowers inside the hut, the fug that we got up had to be seen to be believed. Later on when we got organized, we used to put all the lights out, down the blankets and open the windows wide for about ten minutes around 9.00 o'clock. That helped quite a bit.

Your're probably wondering what a 'blower' is, well, just another kriegie invention. It was really a miniature blacksmiths forge mounted on a board, instead of bellows we rigged up a fan

driven by turning a handle. It was very simple, but equally efficient. It would burn practically anything and could boil a litre of water in a minute.

I seem to keep diverging and never really get on to the end of the war, but that's exactly what happened, everything seemed to stop, the Russian offensive slowed down and stopped, the American s were approaching very slowly and all the time we wondered would it never end.

One other thing that was sent to plague us all was a weakness of the bladder. I should say without exception that this affected us all. It was worst at night, when there was only one urinal available in the block for the use of about 440 officers. The ablutions etc., were in the centre of two blocks. I reckon that at one time, owing to the lack of food, drinking so much liquid and the cold, that every officer had to get out of bed at least twice in the ~~at~~ night. Personally no matter what time I got up at, I had to queue up. Little things no doubt, but it was the straw that broke the camels back.

Eventually there arrived a day, a never to be forgotten day, the 7th of March, 1945, to be exact. Lee Usher had managed to organize a trade for a whole Danish Red Cross Parcel from the Norwegians. He supplied some clothing as did Bill Thallon and myself, this included a pair of brand new shoes that Bill couldn't wear because he was suffering from Athlete's Foot rather badly. He also supplied his last pipe and the remains of his tobacco, while I supplied some of my precious cigarettes. We were to accept delivery the following morning after parade. Now I have mentioned very little about the rumours we got about parcels in general and nothing else in particular, food was our one thought. Well, on 7th of March we paraded to be counted and the Senior British Officer announced that 150,000 American Red Cross Parcels had arrived from Sweden, they were down at the railway station and there would be an issue of one parcel per head the next day. This was indeed wealth beyond our dreams of avarice.

I don't know what little bits and pieces we ate that day, but by God the cupboard was certainly bare when we went to bed that night. How we slept I just don't know. We got our Danish parcel about 9.30 the next morning and started to eat right away. We kept our meals small, but very often, which is probably what saved us. Three American Red Cross parcels were duly collected at lunch time, I must say they felt quite weighty in our reduced circumstances. Well after that, we really started eating and drinking, I think what we all enjoyed most of all was our first cup of decent coffee. Everyone was doing much the same as us, perhaps we were lucky or better organized as none of us were sick that night, whereas a lot of the other blokes were. What a waste of good food. All that happened in our case was that none of us could sleep a wink that night, but it was worth it and I would do it again.

We had all reckoned that 150,000 parcels between about 14,000 of us would keep us really well fed for the rest of the war, but we reckoned without our Senior Officers. Looking back I can see they were right, but at the time I felt, in common with all the rest, that they were off their heads. They decided that all the prisoners of war in the camp, including the b----- French, were to have their fair share. Our trials and tribulations for the next few weeks were great, at any rate they were great the way we were thinking them. We were expected to save one parcel per head out of three weeks issue, but I'm afraid for the first time I mutinied and we decided to eat all we could get. I couldn't help remembering all the food we had had to leave behind at Sagan when we left in a hurry.

Time marched on, our issue of parcels stayed at one per week but the German rations steadily decreased and our hunger stayed with us. At this time, the beginning of April, both fronts had been static for some time and we were in despair that they would never move. My birthday turned up on Good Friday, which made my fourth birthday in Germany, and I realized that I had spent nearly one sixth of my life as a prisoner of war. Maybe my birthday did it, but both fronts suddenly started to move and on Easter Sunday Bill and Lee presented me with a birthday cake to celebrate both occasions. It was most enjoyable ~~even~~ even though it came out of all our rations and we went a bit short afterwards.

About this time a rumour went around that all the officers were going to be moved to Moosberg near Munich, which meant a train trip of about a couple of hundred miles through a narrow corridor between the Russians and Americans. Bill Thallon, who had been pretty sick, and I decided to go sick and miss this move, just for a change. However, when the move was ordered on 12th April, we both decided to go, a change was as good as a rest, so we packed up and got ready to leave with the rest.

The following morning we were informed that we were on the sick list and couldn't go, just like the ruddy Germans, so we had to move into another block with the rest of the so-called sick. Meanwhile about 1,200 R.A.F. Officers with a few N.C.O.s moved off to the station. They had been supposed to move the day before, but the transport wasn't ready, surprising? The block that we moved into was filthy, so we all got down to it and spent the best part of the day cleaning it up. When I say it was filthy, it was a lot cleaner than when our lads had arrived there, but they had made no attempt to keep it clean when they were packing to depart. For that matter we had left our own block in a pretty bad state as well.

Late in the afternoon we finished our task, had a shower and put on clean clothing; then we were informed that the other party were not, after all, going to Moosberg (the Senior British Officer had at last managed to talk the Commandant out of it). The story also got around that some of our lads had ~~the~~ sabotaged their one and only engine and I wouldn't put it past them.

We spent one night in our new block and then moved back into our old quarters, where we spent the morning getting it tidied up for the returning travellers. At least it put in a couple of days for us.

That night we saw our one and only full scale air raid on Berlin, it was a raid by about 700 bombers on Potsdam. We were about thirty miles due south of it and believe me, ours was a grandstand seat, I would have hated to be any closer. During that day we also saw some ~~lightning~~ Lightnings and Thunderbolts of the American Air Force.

The news was terrific, the Russians had advanced to within 25 miles of our camp and the Americans were about the same distance away on the other side. An American scout was brought into the camp on the 15th, he had been one of a forward party and had been wounded in the foot the previous day. The Germans had made him walk to the camp, so you can guess how he felt.

On Thursday, 18th April, two of our N.C.O.s were shot dead trying to escape over the wire, a thing that I'm sure would never have happened if the Germans had had any idea of the true war situation. The next day our Senior British Officer went to the Commandant and showed him our news bulletin and demanded the name of the sentry responsible and also put the fear of God into the Commandant. So much so that the next day our guards gradually disappeared and in the evening we took over the camp.

It all worked very smoothly, Bill went over to the N.C.O.s compound and took charge of a block there, Lee moved into the main cookhouse and I was left on my own. We heard quite a bit of shooting going on around the camp, rifle, machine-gun and occasionally shell fire, however, our 'piece de resistance' occurred in the evening or rather the late evening just after we had got into bed.

The Germans had had a nasty habit of abandoning a Prisoner of War Camp and then sending up their fighters to strafe it, just for good measure and were a little worried about this. Anyway I was comfortably settled in my top bunk, when I heard a low-flying aircraft approach the camp. It was a very bright night, with a full moon, so the camp must have been very easily seen. He came down very low over the huts and went on his way, so we all sighed a sigh of

relief; then we heard him coming back. Back he came - then he opened fire with his cannons - I just rolled straight out of bed, blankets and all and I had about six feet to drop. Fortunately the bloke underneath me beat me to the drop and I landed fairly soft. We found out the next day that it was a German fighter, but that he had opened fire right over the top of the camp at some object much further on. Nevertheless, it was most upsetting and Bill appeared the next day with his face bashed in, he had hit a stool as he dived for cover. There were quite a number of lads limping around the next day.

Shortly after dawn on Sunday, 22nd April, 1945 a Russian armoured car drove into the camp and we were officially released, for myself after four year and nine months of imprisonment. It was a very different release to what we had all envisaged, the b----- French cheered and kissed their deliverers, but we just stood and looked. There was little joy to be seen in any of the British or American faces and I for one was terribly disappointed.

The Russian prisoners were released that day and taken into Luckenwalde, by that time there were about 5,000 of them and the conditions that they were living in had to be seen to be believed. After they had left we organized a party to go round their huts and take out the dead and dying. There were four bodies, which we added to the other two in their mortuary, a further eight were taken over by the doctor, who had little hope for them.

I should think that Luckenwalde will remember that night for some time to come. That evening we had young girls, some not any older than eleven or twelve, coming up to the camp and asking for sanctuary, they had already been raped two or three times. It seems hard, but we had little love for any German at that time, so they were turned away. During the next few days quite a few people ventured into the town unofficially and confirmed most of these reports. Some of them got fixed up in German homes, where they were welcomed, as the Russians would not touch a house where either the British or Americans had taken over. All they wanted to know was were they getting everything they wanted.

Food was still short and the Russians could help us little, we took out all the rest of the unclaimed parcels and distributed them amongst the British and Americans. About the only food that the Russians could give us was flour, bread, peas and potatoes; this was completely the wrong diet for people who had been as hungry as we had been. Within a week everyone got very fat in the face and looked a lot healthier, but it was only mud fat and did us no real good.

We were not allowed out of camp and time hung very heavily on our hands, Bill Thallon had little to do in his job, so he and I spent quite a lot of time talking to our American friends and listening to the rumours that arrived ~~xx~~ every five minutes. There was still quite a lot of fighting going on all round us and we had, in fact, been cut off twice, but only by Germans who were breaking through from the East to get to the American lines to give themselves up. It was now the 2nd May and after eleven days freedom morale was worse than ever it had been.

The Russians had arranged that we should take over the Adolf Hitler Lager, which was a very superior rest camp designed for war weary German Officers. There is no doubt about it, it had everything, hundreds of single rooms, all with running water and shower baths, swimming pool, billiards rooms, gymnasium, bars and wonderful kitchens. It was fairly well equipped, in particular I was told that it had some wonderful glassware. The long and short of it is, the French had got in before us and when the Russians told them to get out (they had no love for them either) they wrecked the joint. Smashed all the glass they could lay their hands on, pulled out and smashed the wash-basins and lavatories, broke the bannisters and furniture and ruined the projectors in the cinema. You can guess what they did with the swimming pool, including a dead horse. Nice people.

On 3rd May, 1945, an American jeep turned up with three war correspondents in it and they assured us that they would send American transports the next day to fetch us out. Absolutely everyone was ready to leave at dawn the next day, but there was a snag, the Russians wouldn't allow us to go, they didn't know our names. Nevertheless, the trucks were parked about five kilometers down the road and rapidly filled up with Americans, who were rapidly taken home.

It was the usual arrangement, if the Americans released a camp, then they took out their men then their officers and after that came the British. We did the British first, then the Americans. This business of slipping out of camp and sneaking away in the transport made the whole job very slow. Bill and I put in our time by going for a walk in the surrounding countryside but even that wasn't very satisfactory as we found great difficulty in turning back to the camp. We naturally always walked towards the west.

There had been a certain amount of small scale looting going on and I was not surprised when Bill asked me to join him in a goose dinner one day. He had evidently borrowed a revolver that Lee Usher had picked up somewhere and had made a small sortie against a farm house. I didn't approve but I certainly enjoyed the goose.

The rumours had now changed to the various numbers of lorries which were to appear, always the following day. Transports did appear each day but in ever decreasing numbers. During this period two Americans went nuts and had to be taken care of. One thing I should have said before was, that on the fourth of May a fleet of ambulances arrived and took away all our sick. They left before anybody went in the trucks.

On the 7th May Bill, being otherwise engaged, I decided to go for a walk. As I had never seen any of the trucks that were taking the lads home, I thought I would cheer myself up by at least seeing somebody else get home. I walked out the main gate intending to go down to the little village, where the trucks were waiting, when a jeep drew up alongside me. An American Officer lent out and said "Going down to the trucks Buddy". I said "Yes, I thought I'd have a look", well, he told me to jump in, as there wasn't much time left and off we went. As we arrived in the village a truck pulled out, which left only one behind. The American Officer said "You'd better step on it if you want to make it". So I stepped on it and about thirty second later I was on my way to the American lines.

Those truck drivers certainly didn't waste any time, nevertheless when we arrived at the river Oder the Russians refused to allow the convoy to cross and I began to feel that I was back where I started. The Officer in Charge of the convoy wasted no time. He turned us due south keeping along the river and we tried a couple of other bridges, without success. The next bridge we came to had been blown up but there was still a footpath across made by the falling masonry. Believe it or not we simply left the trucks on the Russian side of the river and everybody, including the drivers, walked across to American occupied territory. So far as I was concerned the war had finally ended.
