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1

...e and a hole in my arm about the size of
...n guard shoved me into a barred cell and
...is over." He closed the door behind him
...my thoughts in this two-by-four rat-hole.
...with an entirely new experience in store
...ly a few hours ago I was a free man, and
...when the German Luftwaffe put an end
...ge of my wooden bed, where I had been
...interrogated.

...I would have a great deal of time to think.
...fting back to the time when my crew left
...efore boarding a brand-new government-
...crew all knelt down and kissed the ground
...w York.

...u real soon—I hope," said the tail gun-
...cup and climbed into the glistening new
...a huge diamond. This might be the last
...ork again. Every man's nose was firmly
...ship's windows as it slowly lifted off the

...mpire State Building captured the views
...soon faded away in the shadows of the
...ceeded on toward the Atlantic. The sight
...almost tore your heart out as it, too, took
...the Empire State. The ship's pilot banked
...a twenty-degree angle, then leveled her
...ship's nose in the direction of the northern

We must have soared over a million and one Canadian mountains. From an altitude of ten thousand feet, they looked like a flock of ant hills. We made a few quick landings in Canada, but only to refuel. Iceland was our last refueling stop before we headed in the direction of England. The white clouds below hid all views at first, but as the bomber pulled out into God's clear skies, the blue Atlantic hogged up all sights below. It looked so peaceful and calm from way up there, as it stayed below us for at least ten hours.

The coast of England took over from there as the bomber passed its shoreline, and it wasn't long before I could see the beautiful blue grasses of Scotland rippling in the mild breeze. The toylike cattle grew larger as we approached the landing strip. The ship dropped slowly earthward over some farm land and gently touched its wheels to the landing strip. The ship rolled a short distance farther before it came to a stop. We were en route to Norwich, England, where we were to be assigned to the 8th Air Force and fly combat missions over enemy-occupied Europe. Our stopover in Scotland was just long enough to have the ship checked and refueled, but after viewing such pleasant surroundings, I would have been satisfied to remain there for the duration.

The members of my crew were the finest in the world. Jerry Rickey, the pilot (and a pumddinger of a pilot, at that), was twenty-nine years of age. He hailed from a city near to my home town in Ohio; his constant smiling was an outstanding feature. He wore his second lieutenant's hat with a sloppy-Joe effect, and the opinions of the boys concerning respect for his rank never worried him. His family was well-to-do and his greatest ambition was to someday pelly-roll the B-24 bomber. Jerry was a happy-go-lucky guy with a great many possibilities.

The copilot, Bill Davis, was a somewhat different type of fella. He, too, resided in Ohio. Bill was a former schoolteacher with a pleasant personality and a fair sense of humor, but was very strict. He spoke in a soft tone of voice, and his smooth hands revealed his former occupation. Like Rickey, he was also a second lieutenant and wanted respect for his rank, in fact demanded it and didn't show respect, he'd soon let you that you show it. If you did

know about it. Although he wasn't as good a pilot as Rickey, he was somewhat calmer. If he ever got excited, he never showed it.

George Rocco was the bombardier with a hilarious sense of humor. He was the type of guy who'd ask, "Why'd you duck?" if a 75-mm. cannon was fired at you. George's home was in Boston, Massachusetts. He was a short, dark-complexioned fellow of Italian descent, but his accent told you immediately that he was a Bostonian. George was pretty chummy with the navigator, and the childish action and talk that went on between these two officers used to scorch Bill Davis, but the rank there was all equal, and Bill could only give them advice concerning their conduct as officers, even though it was in an angry tone of voice.

Bert Hanson was our navigator, and though he knew his navigation like a book, he was a comical type of guy, somewhat like Rocco. Either one of them would play up to any silly conversation you might start with them. But Rocco had more nerve, while Bert was the most jittery fella I've ever seen. He was always cautioning Rickey to be careful. Bert was of medium height, with a sharp nose that was very obvious but also becoming to him. He was a nice-looking chap and took a lot of ribbing from us.

Gary Smith was our radio man, and gave the impression that he was brought up to be very religious. He came from Buffalo, New York. He was the most decent, sincere fellow I'd ever met and was the only one who was true to his girl friend back home. He'd get disgusted with the foul language we used purposely in his presence, but he never held it against any of us. He couldn't even talk to one of our officers for as much as a second without one of us calling him a brown-noser. "Go on, you goddam brown-noser," the tail gunner would often tease.

"I'm not brown-nosing," Gary would argue back, "but these are matters I have to discuss with them concerning the mission."

"Yeh, yeh, we understand, brownny," the tail gunner would go on teasing until he couldn't keep from laughing. Gary would argue back and try to convince us he wasn't a brown-noser, and, truthfully, he was far from being one. But that's what made it all the more fun.

Jim Thomas, our engineer-gunner, was a short, fair-looking rebel from Mississippi, who liked nothing better than to aggravate

us. When we were about to blow our tops, he'd walk away smiling. He had a long southern drawl, and when in an argument with anyone he'd think first before he'd talk and usually knew what he was talking about. Jim was even more successful in aggravating the officers except Rickey. He was as too happy-go-lucky a guy to be teased by anyone.

The assistant engineer, Pete Krupp, came from Maryland. He was a thin medium-built fellow whose dad was a mortician. Pete was quick-tempered, but meant no harm. However, he was a handy man to have around. Whenever anyone was troubled with a cyst or boil, he'd cut it out with the skill of a doctor. Jim just loved the fact that Pete was quick-tempered. He'd torture the two of them until they would almost come to blows.

Pete would like to meet your girl friend when we get back home," Jim would say. "After she goes out with me just one time, she won't want anything to do with you anymore." You can well see why these two would almost come to blows.

The mail gunner, Bob Graham, was another happy-go-lucky guy like Rickey. Graham was a swell guy, but his foul language was very embarrassing, especially when in the same company with Gary Smith. He'd ride Gary as Jim rode Pete. Bob was Gary's direct opposite, but they were the very best of friends.

Sam Jerome was about the best friend I had. He was a Jewish lad from Maryland, with a rather short, stocky build and a prominent hook to his nose. If anything was troubling you, he was the type of guy who was always on hand to listen and help with your hardships in any way he possibly could. Sam had one bad habit. While talking to you, he'd often shake his right leg continuously, as though he had St. Vitus's dance, but it was only a habit and a reaction of his nerves.

Believe it or not, I was the comedian of the crew. I'm from Youngstown, Ohio. I'm six feet tall and weighed 175 pounds. I am very good-looking and can do anything, and people often mistake me for a movie star. "Yak, yak."

Besides being the best darn bunch of men you could find, they appreciated my jokes, which, of course, made me more fond of my crew. Rickey headed my list of supporters. He'd laugh just as soon as I look at me. He always said, "Uncle Sam must have

sure been hard up to take you." He was joking, of course—I "theenk"? My job was to man the left waist gun, while Sam Jerome handled the right waist gun. Our ship's ball turret was operated by the assistant engineer, and the nose turret was handled by the engineer. The following morning we took off from this beautiful land of Scotland and headed into the southeastern part of the United Kingdom.

It was several hours later before our ship's wheels touched the ground of our final destination, Norwich, England, where we became part of the 8th Air Force. This permanent base of ours was located just a little to the west of the town of Norwich. It covered quite a few acres of land, and there was no fence around the base, making it fairly easy for unwelcome guests to get in. There were the landing strips that were about three to four hundred yards long. At the south end, where the road began, stood the briefing-room building. Next to that, coming west, was the supply room, and, moving on down the line, next to that was the chapel, which was on the corner. The crossroad that ran up past this road had barracks on both sides of it. These barracks looked as if someone had taken a bunch of giant-sized oil drums and sawed them in half, lengthwise. Each half served as a barracks for a crew. If you traveled south now again for several hundred yards, another road also ran west. A few barracks were on this road, but mostly trees on both sides. The mess hall and recreation room stood at the far end of this road to the left.

Running north alongside the mess hall was another road that ran to the left of the dispensary and officers' quarters. At the end of this road was a left turn, then a short right turn that took you on the road where our barracks was located. There was a small wooded area off to the right of these little turns that was often used to short-cut from one road to another, and a very appropriate hiding place this wooded area would have made for some unwelcome guests. The orderly room was about halfway up to the right of this road, and at the very end of this road to the left stood our humble barracks, with, of course, other barracks all around and about all the way down the road.

The barracks that housed us was the only one that was built

of brick. Upon entering our barracks you saw a large shower room, with only one shower in it. The shower was so low that you had to kneel down to take a decent shower. In the center to the left was a partition, and on the other side were two commodes with the overhead chain. There were two doors entering our sleeping quarters, one on each side of the partition. Our sleeping quarters was a simple square room with six beds along the walls. In the center stood a small coal stove, and on the left wall, right up above Gary Smith's bed, was a small window adorned with a pair of black curtains over it that were drawn open by strings.

The days that followed found us doing a great deal of training missions around the coast of the United Kingdom. This type of life wasn't too bad, although at times I wished we were already flying combat missions. Under certain conditions while we were still in training, the army had tended toward being chicken, and I don't mean chicken-hearted. The monotonous training and schooling that followed made the next month a dull one. At the end of the day, we'd often stroll down to the landing strip on the base, where we'd count the ships as they returned from a combat mission.

The ground crew chief was always on hand to sweat it out as much as the boys on the return of his ship, and he'd sweat it out as much as the boys on the missions did. He was the last man to check out that ship, and the responsibility for any mechanical defects rested upon his head and shoulders. If his ship didn't get back, he'd hang his head and wonder if it could be because of an error on his part. However, most of the ships were usually in perfect mechanical condition when they left the base, and it gave me a feeling of confidence in knowing they'd be servicing our combat ships in the very near future. The very near future rolled around a lot sooner than I had expected.

Our practice missions and tiresome waiting came to a focus on the morning of June 6, 1944, while I was lying comfortably in my sack dreaming of home. The pleasant sound of the sergeant's deep, growling voice awoke me.

"Is this Jerry Rickey's crew?" he asked, as he held a flashlight in my face like a spotlight.

"Yes," I replied, "but take that goddam spotlight out of my face. I didn't kill anybody, yet."

"Okay, okay," he answered, "don't get the balls of your feet in an uproar," as he flicked on the overhead light. He told us we were scheduled to fly our first combat mission that morning. "Go grab yourselves some grub at the mess hall," he continued, "and be at the briefing room within an hour." With this final statement, he departed and made his way to the next barracks. Everyone was awake and sitting on the edge of his bed for a moment of silence. Then the humor began.

"Don't look so worried," said the engineer, Jim Thomas, to the assistant engineer, Pete Kruppa. "It looks like your father won't even get your business, tsk, tsk, what a shame."

"Ah, why don't you shove your humor in your ear," shouted Pete, "and worry about your own hide, not mine."

"Oh, I'm definitely not worried about your hide," remarked Jim. "I'm just trying to figure out what exit of the ship would be the most convenient to push your carcass out of, once it gets full of German hot lead. I'm telling you," he went on, "give me your girl's address, and as soon as you bite the dust, I could go back and take care of her for you. She'd like me better than you, anyway—you know that."

"You stupid son-of-a-bitch," Pete argued back, "I ought to hammer you for that." Jim smiled and departed through the door.

In spite of his aggravating humor, Jim wasn't really a bad guy. The angrier a person got, the more Jim would rub it in, and Pete seemed to be his favorite guinea pig. Previously, Jim started "riding" me along the same line, but, realizing I enjoyed listening to him rather than being angered, he gave up and stuck to his buddy, Pete. The two squabbled and argued all the way to the mess hall, and Jim kept up his humorous remarks.

"One of these days," remarked Gary, as we entered the mess hall, "one or the other is going to get hurt."

"What's that you say, brownny?" Graham started, but was cut short by Gary, as he smilingly said, "For cripes' sake, don't you start now, let me eat my breakfast in peace."

"Piece, that's what I'd like to have a little of right now," re-

plied Graham. But Gary ignored his remarks and, still smiling, proceeded to the serving counter. Graham continued whispering sweet little evil nothings into Gary's Christian ear as we sat down to eat. When Gary brought his first bite of food to his mouth, Graham began talking about dead rats with pus running out of their ears. I don't remember what we had for breakfast that morning, but after eating hash so much in this army I took it for granted that we had it on the menu. After that enjoyable breakfast and interesting discussion on dead rats, the different crews straggled one after another to the briefing room.

At the door of this briefing room stood two giant-like M.P.'s who were guarding the one-way entrance into the place. Anyone who didn't belong there didn't get in. The fliers gained entrance only after reciting the new password scheduled for that day, which was revealed to us daily by our pilot.

A short time later, the congregation had all assembled; the briefing officers entered and went to the head of the room where, from a stagelike platform, they would talk to us. Behind them, on the wall, hung a bedsheet concealing a giant-sized map of Europe, which they used in pointing out the route we were to take for that particular mission.

These officers had a terrific sense of humor as they spoke, and we smiled to be polite as we listened. But, all kidding aside, they were the type of boys you enjoyed having around in a situation such as this. They'd furnish us with all the necessary information, then the officer in charge would pick up a stick and draw back the sheet, exposing the map.

"This is the route you will take," he said, pointing to the tape that was attached to the map with thumbtacks.

The tape at that time stretched out from our base and over London, then zigzagged over the Channel to the target which was called Ponabault, a place located about twenty miles off the coast of France.

"There you have it," said the briefing officer, "and if anyone has any questions to ask before I turn you over to the chaplain, go right ahead, and I'll try to answer them to the best of my knowledge." He glanced about the room looking for raised hands,

but since no one had any questions to ask he turned us over to the chaplains, who were always welcomed by us and would give us the last words of kindness before we left to board our ship.

The fliers would then gather around their own chaplain, depending on their beliefs. It didn't matter really which one gave you his blessings, because the men were very fond of all the chaplains, regardless of religion. After listening to a few words of kindness from these army chaplains, it seemed as though all fears had left us. "We'll see you after the mission, boys," were usually their departing words of encouragement to us.

We left the briefing room and hiked over to the supply room to pick up our parachutes and other necessary flying equipment. From there the men climbed into a near-by army truck that took them down the ramp and into a revetment where a B-24 bomber was loaded down with seven thousand pounds of bombs ready to go. The ground crew had the ship in tiptop shape waiting for us. We arrived a little before the officers did and acquainted ourselves with the ground crew. Although everyone was nervous and jittery, the gunners tried to hide it by a display of corny humor. The discussion drifted to the ever popular subject of women.

"I wonder what the German *Fräuleins* are like?" questioned Bob Graham. "I hear from rumors they're pretty nice." "They're all the same to me," said Sam, "depending on how you look at them."

The crew continued on this subject until they got pretty ornery. Gary Smith listened momentarily, then said in disgust, "Why don't you guys grow up and talk sensible?"

"Why, we're talking very sensible," teased Graham. "What's the matter with you? Don't tell me you wouldn't want a little chance."

"Don't be silly," remarked Gary. "I've got more important things to occupy my time than to be fooling around with the type of girls you associate with."

"Now listen, browny," Graham went on teasing, "don't talk that way about the girls I associate with. You know as well as I do that I go out with nothing but virgins, and the first fresh move they make I slap their hands."

... speak for yourself, man, speak for yourself," said Bert. "May- want to die young, but I'd like to hang onto every second I got coming to me."

... eyes focused on the ground signal tower from which a was fired, and our giant bomber started taxiing down the toward the take-off strip.

... e ships were no sooner lined up in single-file formation another flare was fired, and the first bomber went flipping the take-off strip. His wheels slowly lifted off the ground, less than a minute the second ship started down the strip. Others followed in the same manner. Moments later, our ship zooming down the strip and began slowly rising off the d. Together with the rest of the formation, we continued the field. The entire formation was completely formed at tude of about ten thousand feet, but the circling procedure ued until we got the okay signal from the ground tower to ead. The formation crept along over England toward the el, and, upon reaching it, the deep roaring sound of the s hit a higher pitch, but changed back to their normal deep s we passed by the coast of France.

... great deal of activity was taking place in the English Chan- this was D-Day! Although we were unaware of it, our troops on their way to invade the coast of Normandy. All this ex- ent soon faded out in the horizon behind us, as the forma- continued on toward its selected target.

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Rocco, the bombardier, then spoke. "Bomb-bay doors open," he said, as we pulled closer into formation with the other ships and stuck together like glue.

We approached the target with our bomb-bay doors wide open, the bombardier of the lead ship got his bead on the target, then, "Bombs away" was the next order, and George Rocco's hand released the salvo switch sending our entire bomb load toppling earthward. As the bombs went off in a chain reaction, they looked like a bunch of toy firecrackers; they hit the target and demolished it completely. It felt good to know that we had a mission under our belt and were homeward bound. This sort of mission with little or no opposition was referred to as a "milk run," and the entire formation made it back to England safely.

After our landing, we were all taken to the interrogating room, where we were questioned by Army Intelligence about the mission, and thus they were able to obtain valuable information from us. The crews were seated around a large table in this room, with the interrogating officer sitting at the table's head. The corporal or sergeant in charge would pour a shot of whiskey for each man of the crew, while an intelligence officer would ask each of us questions. I liked this part of the missions best of all, because most of my crew didn't drink and I was usually the one who ended up with the extra drinks, provided I beat Rickey and Graham to it.

2

We took life easy for the next few days that followed and, not being scheduled to fly, we'd often take a walk down the winding road behind our barracks and visit a near-by pub that was only a short distance down the road from the base. It seemed that to get anywhere in England, you always had to travel along a couple of winding roads and around a curve. Most of the streets ran in circles, making it very easy to get lost.

I remember the day Jim and I were wandering around the town of Norwich looking for a pub we were already familiar with. We went around a couple of bends and turns until we saw a place that looked like it and, not paying any attention to the swinging sign that hung over the door, we entered and found ourselves in a private living room. We were unnoticed by the two children who were playing on the floor, but an elderly man who was reading a newspaper looked up at us in surprise. The two of us made an about-face and hustled out of there. I don't know what the sign above the door said, because we were in too much of a hurry to look back. As I said before, those winding roads always got me confused.

The English taxi driver was your best bet whenever this kind of confusion occurred, but he always had a bad habit of taking you around the same circle about a dozen times before reaching your destination. However, although the price he charged was very much quarreled with by the underpaid Britisher, to the G.I.'s it seemed a very fair price. The average Britisher had no special love for the American G.I. For reasons such as the one I've just mentioned, they blamed the G.I. for the higher prices they had to pay for everything, and they'd often tell us that we

were being overpaid. We always struck back at them, saying, "We're not overpaid; it's just that you are all underpaid." As a result, arguments of this nature always came up between the English and the G.I.'s.

However, the female sex took a different attitude towards us. As a matter of fact, they liked us better because they felt the G.I.'s weren't as cold toward them as their own boys, and they were so right. I've never known a G.I. who was opposed to women. If there are any, they should have their heads examined.

I'm quite sure everyone is familiar, by now, with the name Picadilly Circus. This was a very popular section of London, and what a section. It was a district you couldn't walk a full block of without at least once being confronted by some female hustler with a proposition. This was a section of town where no man ever got lonesome as long as he carried a few pounds in his pocket and wanted some company. Like everything else, the prices went up here, too. One night I went out with Graham and Thomas, and the three of us had a few pounds apiece in our pockets. We were looking for women as we wandered three abreast up the streets of Picadilly. The blackout made me feel like a blind person, but the natives of Picadilly were accustomed to it. The voices of two women aroused our attention in the darkness. They saw us, but it wasn't until we strained our eyes a little that we saw the silhouette of their figures step out from a doorway. One was pleasingly plump and the other was skinny beyond attractiveness. I couldn't make out their facial features, but the plump girl's voice sounded pretty sweet and friendly as she questioned us.

"You boys looking for a little fun?"

"Yes," replied Graham, "and a little wine to boot. It seems as though every place is closed up."

"I can get you all the wine you want," she said, "as long as you got the money."

"What'll it cost?" I asked.

"Oh, about four pounds," was her reply.

"Okay," I said, "here's four pounds," handing her the money. "Let's go."

"Oh, no," she said, "you wait here, and we'll be back in a few minutes with the wine."

"Just a second," interrupted Graham. "You go get the wine. Your girl friend will stay with us until you get back."

"Hmm, you don't trust us," she said, "but all right, I'll be right back." And she disappeared into the darkness of the night.

The three of us backed into the doorway with the other girl, and to help pass the time we played the game of roaming hands, with the girl as the main attraction. The only trouble was that I kept running into Graham's and Thomas' hands, otherwise it was all right. She didn't seem to mind, because she made no attempt to stop us, and before I knew it her dress was pulled up and anxious hands were tugging at her pants.

"Take it easy, one at a time," she whispered.

Just then, the other woman returned with the wine. "Here it is," she said. "Let's go."

"Let's go where?" I questioned.

"Up to our apartment, silly," she answered, "where we can enjoy a few drinks, and besides it will be safer there."

"Okay," we agreed, and our happy little party started up the street with the two women walking between us. We walked about one and a half circles before we reached another dark doorway.

"Here's the apartment," said the plump one, as she reached in her handbag and pulled out a key. She opened the door and our little party entered. I was the first to enter and I stumbled on some steps.

"Be careful," she warned, "and keep right on going up the steps."

The herd started up the steps, fumbling in the darkness all the way up. What a stairway! It was so long I thought I was climbing a stairway to the stars. Upon reaching the top, we passed through another door and entered their one-room apartment. The dim light of the room outlined two old chairs and a table that looked older than the five of us together. Over to the right of the room, and drawn shut tight, hung a pair of green drapes that were so old and dirty that they could have stood up by themselves. On the other side of the room was a low sink piled high with dirty dishes. There wasn't any bathroom in this apartment, and the floor served as the sleeping quarters for the girls. Graham

I sat on the chairs while Thomas took a seat on the floor. The girls walked over to the sink and rinsed out a few dirty glasses.

"I'll drink mine out of the bottle," said Graham.

"Me too, if you don't mind," added Thomas.

I followed with, "So will I." Graham picked up one of the bottles and took a few swigs, then handed it to me, while the other girls filled up their glasses from the other bottle and joined us.

It didn't take long before the skinny dame was sitting on my lap. Thomas had already spread a sheet on the floor and had the pimp dame well under control.

"Come on, take off your pants," I could hear him say, as he pulled another sheet over himself.

"All right," she agreed, "but it'll cost you two pounds."

"Okay, okay," he agreed, as he reached for his pants and took two pounds and handed it to her. She placed it in the bosom of her dress, and from the sound of things Thomas was satisfied and contented with his female companion, even though he was

two pounds lighter. The rest of us, pretty well intoxicated now, looked on and chuckled. My lady friend was getting a big kick out of it all, and I didn't realize how homely she was until she

laughed aloud and completely sprayed my face. I noticed her teeth were just dark-brown stubs, but a few more swigs of wine

plastered and hard up, so he grabbed her from my lap and threw her to the floor.

"Gimme some money," she said. "I'll give you a couple of blinkers and a fat lip, you tramp," he replied.

"Don't call me a tramp, you dirty son-of-a-bitch," she shouted. "I'll tell certain people what you called me, you'll never leave this place alive."

"Ah, shut you, you old bag," he continued. "We spent four pounds on wine. What the goddam hell else do you want? Now

pour off your goddam pants or I'll tear them off, because I don't want to wait all night."

About this time the green drapes at the other end of the room were drawn back, revealing a bed, a handsome blond-haired

fella, and sitting next to him in bed was a beastly-looking dame of about sixty years of age. He jibber-jabbered in a foreign tongue. We didn't understand a word he said, but Graham shouted back, "Go jazz yourself, you bastard." The fella glanced about the room and saw three of us. The sight of us convinced him to draw the drapes closed and go on about his business.

The skinny dame was now silent as she lay back on the floor and pulled up her dress. I took one look at the thigh of her leg, it was about the thickness of my forearm, which isn't very thick. This sobered me up enough to change my mind and Graham's too, but Thomas was long-winded and, as he was still going strong with his companion, I reached over and grabbed the top sheet and yanked it off him, revealing him bare, and to me it looked like a half moon jumping all over hell.

"Ah, why don't you guys wise up and let me alone," he begged, pulling the sheet back over himself. We continued this performance, but never once did he let up while this was going on. He just kept pounding away like mad.

The long evening and steady drinking soon showed their effects.

"Where's your bathroom?" I asked.

"There isn't any," replied the human skeleton.

"Okay, then I'll be right back," I said.

"Me too," repeated Graham, as we started for the door.

"No, no, go right in here," said the scarecrow, pointing to the sink. We looked dumbfounded at one another for a moment.

"Ah, what's the matter with you guys?" she asked, as she staggered over to the low sink. She hung over it, and the next sound I heard resembled that of rain pitter-pattering on the dishes, but it couldn't have been rain because there were no leaks in the ceiling, and from the sound of things I'd venture to say she was married about forty-nine different times. She got up, and Graham and I stepped over to the sink and while laughing aloud we washed the dishes, too.

"I'm glad we didn't use any of their glasses," whispered Graham laughingly.

"Me too," said Thomas, as he got dressed, and the three of us departed.

a ride back to camp and tried to catch a little the next mission, but we barely hit the sack when get up and go to it again. We shuffled off to the briefing room and supply room, as we had for our final orders. This second mission of ours higher than the first one, but nothing much to vertetheless, the two bombs painted on our flying fy missions looked very attractive and helped ntng us with the female sex. They often ques- our daring missions, and we'd give them a fan- how rough it was, but little did I realize the o come.

orning we groggily entered the briefing room to ns for our third mission. The briefing officer stood he room with a pointing stick in his hand. He he giant-sized map, drawing back the sheet. The ut all the way from England, up into the North ournd Denmark and Sweden, and continued to target "Berlin."

going to be pretty tough," he warned. "Army In- ntlin the best possible route for you so as to ppposition as possible. However," he continued, a barrage of intense flak for about three minutes target area, but, once out of there, the going tough." With these last words of advice, he bade d in a routine manner we were fully equipped

mbing into the ship, then taxiing, and the take- on found us roaring high above the earth. The d up into the North Sea, as pointed out on the pt slowly around Denmark, Sweden, and edged he Baltic Sea into Germany. We no sooner came border than the flak started to come up.

ieces of shrapnel hit the ship, but not enough to wever, it scared hell out of us, but we continued ormation bypassed to the right of Berlin about e B-17's could be seen in the distance flying op- they also were making a run on the same target.

We watched as they entered the target area and disappeared completely into the solid black smoke of flak that the Germans threw up, but they managed to get rid of their bomb loads and in a very slow-appearing manner made their way out of the flak into safety. They continued unharmed on their way home, and now it was our turn to make a run on the target.

Our entire formation banked over to the left until it seemed as though we were almost at a ninety-degree angle, then slowly leveled out and lined ourselves up with the target "Berlin."

"Man your guns and keep your eyes open for fighter planes," warned Rickey, while the bombardier gave orders for, "Bomb-bay doors open."

We no sooner entered the target area than all hell broke loose, and it seemed as though the jerries threw up everything but the kitchen sink. "Woof, woof, woof," I could hear the flak bursting all about the formation. It sounded like a bunch of mad hound dogs trying to get in at you, and you were up there like a trapped rat, with nothing but a lot of empty space all around you. This intense barrage of flak continued for a solid three minutes, in which time shrapnel was flying all over hell, then "woof" again, a large one exploded several yards away under our right wing.

The ship just about flipped over on its back, but Rickey and Davis pulled her back immediately to a level flying position. At that moment, I became the greatest fanatic for prayer in the air. "If I ever get out of this alive, good Lord, I'll never do wrong again or hurt anyone in any way." I think I had a lot of company collaborating with me in my thoughts of prayer that day; and there must have been a lot of promising done to God.

These three minutes were undoubtedly the longest three minutes in my life. The next order was, "Bomb-bay doors open," and our bombs went toppling down. I didn't pay attention to where the bombs hit because of all the excitement and activity, but it sure felt good to be out of the target area and surrounded with clear blue skies.

"Everything is all right now," encouraged Rickey, "but check for damages."

I immediately hooked the portable oxygen bottle to the hose of my face mask and made my way to the bomb-bay doors. I

and they were still open and cold air was gushing in. It was fourty degrees below zero, so the doors had to be closed. As I glanced up at the far end of the catwalk, I saw Jim Thomas holding a rag wrapped around the broken hydraulic system. He was covered from head to foot with this red fluid, and at first glance, as I made my way to him, I thought he was hit and covered with blood.

"We'll have to close the bomb-bay doors by hand," he shouted. "Our hydraulic system is shot out."

"Well, I'm glad it's only that," I yelled back. "I thought that hydraulic fluid all over you was blood." I managed to reach him, and together we were able to get the doors closed by using a hand crank. I then made my way back to my rightful station and reported the damages to Rickey. Rocco's song of encouragement was the next tune that hummed over the inter-phone system.

"While I'm there in the air with my head in my ass, I think of someone I love." He stopped singing, as he asked, "Hey, Bert, how are you doing?"

"I'll let you know as soon as I crawl out from under my steel net," joked Bert.

"You guys are pretty brave now," Rickey joined in, "but I didn't hear a peep out of any of you just a few minutes ago."

"Well, that was only because there was so much noise going on outside," joked Rocco. "You didn't hear me, but I was talking."

"You must have been talking to yourself," said Bert, "because I didn't hear you either."

"Maybe you didn't," said Rocco, "but I was talking to the same man you were talking to, the Man upstairs."

The formation reached England safely, but our troubles weren't over yet. Upon reaching the base, we were unable to make the regular routine landing with the rest of the formation because of our crippled hydraulic system. All other necessary landing procedures had to be done by hand crank and, once we reached the ground, we'd have no control over the ship bringing it to a stop. We circled the field with the gas indicator bobbing on empty. However, Rickey kept the ship at a five thousand feet altitude to give us time to bail out. All the men were already strapped in their parachutes when we received orders from the ground tower.

"Let your flaps down as much as possible and ease her down to the landing strip to the best of your ability. As soon as your wheels touch the ground and roll a ways, throw out a couple of fixed parachutes from each waist window. This will help slow up your ground speed."

"Hurry up," Rickey warned. "Get those chutes tied to the structure of the plane, because I'm starting to drop."

Sam and I barely got our chutes tied to the ship's structure when Rickey banked her over to the left until he was in direct line with the strip. Then he straightened her out again, and we were on our way down. He had to make certain not to overshoot the strip, because gas was so low; this was his only chance.

"Everybody but the parachute men back to the rear of the ship," he ordered, just as the wheels were about to touch the ground. Then bounce, bounce, bounce, and I knew we were on solid ground.

The entire crew except Sam and me were in the rear of the ship, causing it to sprag. Then we threw out our chutes and hung onto the ripcords. The chutes opened and, together with the spragging, cut down most of our ground speed. The weird screaming of an ambulance siren could be heard as the ship continued to roll down the strip's end, ripping through a small fence onto some farmer's private property, where it lobbed firmly up against a tree. Everyone piled out unhurt, as the "meat wagon" (ambulance) pulled up to the end of the strip.

"Is anyone hurt?" questioned Rickey, a bit excited as he came running to the rear of the ship.

"No, no, no," came back our reply.

"You might as well go back," he shouted to the ambulance driver. "We have no business for you today, and, believe me, I'm certainly glad of that."

During the questioning by the inquisitive crowd of soldiers that gathered, Colonel Barker's jeep entered the scene and picked up the officers of our crew, while another truck followed and picked up the enlisted men, taking us to the interrogating room. Ten drinks of whiskey had already been poured for the crew. Nine were still full, while an empty one sat in front of Rickey. As we entered to take a seat around the table, Rickey joked with the interrogating officers.

"I don't know what we would have done if we hadn't had a courageous man like Ed Dobran around," he said. Just about then a newspaper reporter was admitted into the room. Colonel Barker introduced him to us, while Rickey continued his humorous remarks concerning me. They flooded the crew with questions and, before dismissing us, gave us another shot of whiskey. My drinks totaled up to six because of the boys in the crew who didn't drink. The reporter gave us a wonderful write-up, and the whiskey gave me a beautiful hangover.

The next few days found us a bit short-handed on flying personnel, so our squadrons would usually have the crews fly two missions a day. Although these were always short runs, they were rough and they'd sometimes last an entire day and sometimes only lasted a few days. When the replacement crew came in, the squad went back to its normal flying status.

The missions that followed were unpleasant ones and took us to various targets, such as Munich, Cologne, Berlin, and Kiel, Hamburg. They were other miserable places that were so well fortified with ack-ack guns that you thought the devil himself was throwing hot fire at you. Had it been up to me to judge, there'd never be another of these ugly massacring wars. I had never realized how afraid I was to die, and every mission was a chance to come back alive or in pieces. It was never known if you would come back alive or in pieces. It was like a raffle, only tickets were free. Perhaps to die at home like a civilized person wouldn't be too bad, but the thought of your arms and legs separated from you, or your guts hanging out from your ribs, would make your heart pound like a chime bell.

I remember distinctly our twelfth mission over Munich. The entire air force, including the R.A.F. boys and our bombers from Italy, was concentrated down. You would think that it was pretty well flattened and safe to fly over, but our twelfth mission proved otherwise. The formation entered the target area, and it seemed as though a million tons of flak came up at us. The flying shrapnel missed only small parts of our bomber. Bing, bang, crack, was heard every few

seconds, as the stuff continued steadily to hit different parts of the ship. This wasn't enough; they had to send up their fighters. The planes, which were much more accurate than their flak batteries. The air battle continued for several minutes, in which time several of our planes went down and several of theirs also, making it even so far.

The battle between us and the Luftwaffe ended when a squadron of the most beautiful P-38's I've ever seen came up from the south. The Germans high-tailed it and tried to escape, but there was no escape, as they were outnumbered ten to one by our fighters. I almost felt sorry for them as I watched several of their planes go down in flames, but it was better to see them go down than have it happen to our P-38's.

The Luftwaffe crippled one of our engines and ruined the landing gears. Upon returning to the base, we had a choice of bailing out or staying in the ship while Rickey attempted to crash-land her. Six of us preferred to jump, while the other three stayed with Rickey and sweated it out. He made a successful belly landing, and most of us landed in or around the vicinity of the air base, except Rocco, the bombardier. He had to be different and drifted out a little ways, landing right on his butt in the center of a brick highway.

"Oh, is my ass sore," he complained to us, as we were rounded up. "That goddam highway should have been padded. Why didn't you take care of that, Dobran, and come running with a pillow? Now I won't be able to satisfy my girl friends."

"Good," I said, "now I'll have to take care of them for you." We went over to look at the ship, and I don't see how Rickey brought her in without anybody getting hurt. The propellers were all mangled to hell, one of the landing gears was ripped off, and the ship rested on its nose.

"Maybe I'm not as bad off as I thought," remarked Rocco. "It would have been just my luck to be the unfortunate one if I didn't bail out."

We were fortunate that old Mother Luck was with us again and no one got hurt. However, the tension of these nerve-racking missions was getting the best of us, and in the days that followed we had bitter arguments amongst ourselves for little or no

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We had a very enjoyable time. I don't remember everything we did, but I know the last day sure rolled up fast, and before I knew it we were heading back to the base. The same scenery that looked so good to me on the way up didn't look the same now. We reached our base in no time, and within a few days were back doing the same routine of flying combat.

It was around the beginning of August, and I had my twenty-second bomb paired on my flying jacket, when we ceased flying momentarily. Although we didn't do any flying the next few days, there was a great deal of activity taking place at our base. There were no replacements coming in, so we were used for one another's crew, and our navigator, Bert Hanson, was selected as a temporary replacement to fly a mission with a crew that was shorthanded. He didn't like the idea, but that's war for you.

"Why do they have to pick on me?" he complained to us just before take-off time.

"Search me," replied Rocco. Sam Jerome stood near by, and continuously kept shaking his leg as he listened.

"If you don't quit shaking that goddam leg of yours," complained Bert, "I'll tear it off and beat you with it." Sam unintentionally shaking his leg at a time like this was very annoying to watch, especially when you were in a situation such as ours. He stopped shaking his leg momentarily while Rocco continued his humorous remarks to Bert.

"What kind of flowers do you prefer?" he asked, smiling.

"Any kind will do," said Bert, "but most of all please get some weights and tie them on Sam's leg so it won't dance around like a tin Lizzie."

Sam cracked a smile as his leg started up again like a four-cylinder motor. "For crying out loud," said Bert, as he turned and started for the ship that was almost ready to go, "let me out of here, where I can get into some nice peaceful flak, or that leg will drive me off my nut." Bert climbed into the ship with the insignia "Old Lady" on its side.

The rest of us stood off to the side of the ramp and watched the rising ships as they took off and began the circling procedure around the field. Everyone watched the forming ships until they were high above the earth and on their way toward *Deutschland*.

As they disappeared from view, all the onlookers slowly walked away from the strip to sweat out the long, dragging hours until the bombers would return.

We met that evening at the strip to sweat out Bert's return, and it wasn't long before the weird humming of bombers could be heard in the distance. The engines got louder as they drew nearer and came into view. Now they were right above us, and the first ship peeled off to make its run on the strip, then another and another. Then pounce, bounce, and they went ripping past us. Among the ships coming in were the "Devil's Horns," "Ill Fated," "The Bat," and the "Phantom." They were all in but one. Then we saw it coming in for a landing.

"This must be the 'Old Lady,'" I whispered, with very much doubt in my mind. The ship's wheels touched the ground and whizzed past us. It bore the insignia "Sky Lark," and we knew Bert's ship had met with disaster. Army Intelligence informed us, later that day, that the ship Bert was in got a direct hit over Belgium and exploded in mid-air. To their knowledge, all were dead.

"He was so nervous and jittery," said Rocco through a smile of tears. "It just doesn't seem possible, I can't believe it." Rocco had taken it to heart more seriously than the others, and just to look at him in his deep grief for his best friend made me feel sorry for him.

The following mission still didn't involve us, but, nevertheless, the men all took a stroll down to the take-off strip to see the boys as they took off. Included on this trip was a crew from Italy that had just completed fifty missions from that theater. They were supposed to go home, but volunteered to fly missions from our theater of operations. This, however, was the first and last mission they attempted from our base, for they no sooner got off the ground than their ship barreled over and plunged earthward, exploding with a terrific blast, sending all onlookers, including ourselves, to our stomachs to avoid flying fragments. Lucky that none came sailing in our direction, but the unfortunate bodies of the ship's crew were ripped apart with bloody arms and legs scattered all about.

It was impossible to get all the pieces back to their rightful

owners; however, they were all gathered up and patched together as well as possible. After such an experience, I was seriously thinking of going A.W.O.L., but the thought of home and only thirteen more missions to go kept me going. The twenty-third mission spoiled all my plans of going home, and now we were in worse shape than before we entered the flak home.

Nothing seemed to be right on that day of August 15, 1944. The crew went out to the ship, and because of the low ceiling we lay on the ground around the ship and waited for the fog to lift, hoping and praying this mission would be grounded. As we waited two small playful kittens came along, but no one paid any attention to them, so I picked them up and put them off to the side of the ramp in some tall grass. Then a small squad of hornets showed up and made pests of themselves. Pete, Bob, and I picked up a few sticks near by and began swatting them down.

Jim looked on for a while, then said, "It's bad luck to kill anything that flies, and more so if you fly yourself." We ignored Jim's remark and continued swatting them.

The fog soon lifted, and so did we. The excitement started early when some joker, while still forming, tried to slip his ship into the same slot with us. He came so close that he almost put his wing tip through my waist window, thus forcing Rickey to drop her a hundred feet or so, but everything was soon under control, and Rickey pulled her neatly back into formation. Sometimes this forming business was about as much a pain in the neck as an actual mission itself.

The formation soon started toward the Channel, and the deep roaring of bomber engines seemed to growl out a funeral march, our funeral march. That's about the way a large formation of harmonizing bombers sounds. About five minutes out over the Channel, we made a forty-degree turn to the left and followed the Channel north until the coast of Holland came into view. The formation made a right turn, and I could see the coast below as we passed it; again we were in enemy territory. The flak was comfortably light going into the target area. This flight took us to a jet air base located in the northern part of Germany, somewhere near the town of Kiel.

The bombardier's order of "Bombs away" sent the entire formation's bomb load toppling earthward. Then a quick left bank took us off the target, and, still turning, the formation leveled out and was now taking the same path home that it took coming in. "Say, Doc, I heard Rocco's voice over the phone system, at the dummy air base, just below our left wing.

"take a look at the dummy air base if I've ever seen one." nd said, "That's sure a dummy Who are they trying to kid?"

I looked out the waist window and said, "That's very obvious, to be the real thing. That's what we all thought until Bob Graham's voice interrupted on the phone system. Fighters at six o'clock, and they don't look like escorts."

About a split second later his twin caliber-50 machine guns cut loose. "They're F.W.'s 190's," he shouted, as his guns con-

tinued blasting away. I jumped on my gun and just sprayed everything and anything moving in that great big room upstairs. There must have been about forty of them, as they continued making deadly and effective passes at our creeping formations. It was difficult for us to bring down one of their fighters because the belly portion of these fighters were lined with solid armor-plating, and every time they'd make a pass at us, they'd break away so that their bellies were always facing us, and our bullets would just bounce off with no effect. They'd pick off the bomber first, thus working their way to the next unlucky bomber that fell into the vacant end slot.

I didn't notice any of their planes go down, but three of our bombers went down in flames, and we were forced into the end position. They hopped us next and peppered the living hell out of us. Pete Kruppa, who had thought at this to be an easy mission, fell asleep over the escape hatch. The air battle didn't arouse him in the slightest, and he went right on sleeping. The rest of us were too busy pumping hot lead at the Germans to awaken him. Suddenly, a German's shell found its target, in one of our left engines, which Rickey immediately feathered. Then still another one blasting through the fuselage off to the left of a's jaw in its flight and tore large one car window. It caught Krupp

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 bled for words, and I knew they
 thing s, but I didn't understand a

word they said, until an English-speaking guard ordered me to open my jacket, revealing to them my empty gun holster. After this they seemed to have had more courage.

I tried to support my wounded arm with my other arm while they escorted me on. However, they forced me to hold both arms high above my head. The English-speaking guard didn't seem to be a very bad guy. He pointed in a direction and said, "Amsterdam is only five kilometers that way." Two miles later we reached a large elaborate-looking estate, which he told me was a place where Hitler once held a few sessions.

My heavy flying boots had been lost in the jolt of the jump, so I hiked all the way in my heated slippers, which were as much protection for my feet as a pair of socks. They escorted me into the living-room section of this estate, which was set up in office style, and while I waited there the Germans continued bringing in other captured prisoners. All during this time I made no attempt to doctor my arm until one of the other captured prisoners was brought in. He still had his escape knife with him. No being my wounded arm, he rested it on his knee and doctored it up for me. He squeezed a whole tube of sulphur salve into the freshly opened wound, then neatly bandaged it up. The Germans mumbled and grumbled, but permitted him to doctor up my arm.

After gathering about ten of us together, they marched us to another near-by office building. Thomas was the only familiar one in the group, while the faces of the nine were all new faces. The typewriters in this building were pounding away like mad. This office room was about twenty by fifteen feet in size, with a long counter in it. The counter ran in a direct line with the entrance, with about three feet of space between the wall and the counter. On the other side of the counter were three desks, three chairs, and three typewriters, which at the moment were very busy. The complete room was in a rectangular shape, with venetian blinds on the two windows.

As we waited in this area of three-foot space, a kraut pilot who had just been shot down came barging in with a blood-soaked handkerchief wrapped around his head. He looked at me and must have called me every name he could think of in the

German language. I didn't know what to do, but I smiled at him in a dumb-like way and shrugged my shoulders. This made him blow his top, and he took a swing at me; and as I ducked he turned and began to give everybody in the place hell. As his mouth was going a mile a minute, I eased back into a corner and was glad he got his attention off me.

Under the law of the Geneva Convention, our name, rank, and serial number was all the information we were required to give them. They tried to pump us for more information, but that's all they got. Realizing they were making no headway, they threatened us with violence and had us sent off to one side to think it over and perhaps be questioned later on. This information was momentarily filed in one of the desks in the office. From there, the guards escorted us to the next-door building that housed about twenty barred cells.

4

What was next? My face was scorched and there was a hole in my arm about the size of a silver dollar. The German guard shoved me into a barred cell and said, "For you the war is over." He closed the door and left me alone, in this two-by-four hell-hole for rats, with only my thoughts.

During my stay there, all my personal belongings were confiscated and I was informed as to what happened to the rest of my crew. They told me that Rickey, Jerome, Kruppa, and Graham were killed, while the others all bailed out and were taken prisoner. Gary Smith was the lucky one; he managed to get into the hands of the Hollander underground.

The meals in this place were wonderful. My breakfast consisted of a slice of bread and a cup of ersatz coffee. This was a substitute for coffee the Germans had invented, and it would have been better if the inventor hadn't succeeded. The stuff smelled like a wet dog who needed a bath and tasted twice as bad. The other meals had a little more color to them. The bread was usually buttered or jellied, with a couple of spuds thrown in. I never had it so good.

I had to pass my urine the first night and called for the guard. "There's a bottle in your room for that purpose," he said. I found the bottle, and it served the purpose well, but it wasn't until the following morning that I discovered my beverages were served in the same bottle. I took a few swigs of ersatz coffee and it didn't taste any different. It still tasted and smelled like a stinking dog.

The Germans were quite clever about rationing and preserving with methods such as this. They'd kill two birds with one

stone. The only thing I didn't like about it was being the guinea pig for their ingenious ideas.

I didn't get interrogated, as I expected, but instead I spent a whole week in this barred room. I thought they had forgotten about me until one morning when we were all brought out into the beautiful sunshine. The krauts packed us all into a truck that started to chug along the road like an ice wagon. This truck was operated by the power of burning coal. Every once in a while a guard would hop off the truck and throw a couple of pieces of coal on the fire, and the truck would chug along a little faster. I could have made better time by walking on my hands. The truck drove out into the lonely countryside, and I realized that Germany, too, had some beautiful sights. The truck started chugging up along a winding road that seemed as though it encircled a small mountain. When we reached the top, I could see the entire valley within that vicinity. The valley must have been at least ten thousand feet below, and if you rolled off the edge of the road up there, you could have rolled in the soft grass all the way to the bottom without getting hurt.

The truck chugged along farther into the country until it reached a deserted-looking monastery, which was our destination. Everyone piled out of the truck and entered the monastery. The ground was the only flooring for the first floor, with bits of straw scattered here and there. It looked more like a stable than anything else. I noticed a pair of beat-up steps at the rear of the room that looked more like a ladder than steps. These steps took us to the second floor, and I didn't see much more than the hallway because I was shoved into another barred room.

My room was a simple square one, with a triple-decker bed in it against the right wall as you entered. I don't know why they had a triple-decker bed in here, because I was locked in here all alone. In direct line with the door was a window on the opposite side of the room. There was a big oak tree standing right up alongside of this window, and I was going to climb down it to escape, but the bars on the window were in the way. I didn't mind it so much because I didn't have my climbing shoes on anyway.

I noticed a little peephole in the door, and the slightest

brought a guard to my door, and I could see him at me through the peephole. If I had the spit in his eye, but I did it in my dreams. Nights in this dump would drag along like centuries, such as I was often awakened by horrible nightmares, such as a ugly mass guard's eye the world de it smell awful. It smelled so bad that I could barely sleep with

two weeks in solitary here, in which time I spent most just gazing out the barred window. Never before had I saw how good it was to be free. The trees and grass swayed in the breeze, and the sound of chirping birds were in the morning. A few farmhouses could be seen in the distance, as if everything up here looked peaceful. It didn't seem as if anything was going on, and, although all this world of ordinary life was there, from where I was it was extraordinary. I was called in to be interrogated by the first English-speaking officer. He seemed to be a person I had met. He was soft-spoken and serious. I sat down on a near-by chair, and my eyes fell on a pack of Turkish cigarettes which lay on the table in front of me. I took it, lit it, and took about six or seven drags on it. It was practically a

part of the U.S.A. do you come from?" he asked. "I have been instructed not to give you any information other than your name, rank, and serial number," I replied, watching him. "That information is of no value to us," he said in a laugh. "All we want to do is help you out. Any information you give us will help to get word back to your family in a much shorter time. We can inform them that you are safe."

I remained silent and still kept my eyes on the cigarettes, as I continued with the questions pertaining to our mission.

"How much of a bomb load was your bomber carrying on your fatal mission, Sergeant?" he asked, as he flipped another cigarette out of the pack and offered it to me. I snatched the cigarette and lit it quickly before he'd change his mind.

"I really don't know," I told him truthfully. He thought I was lying, but little did he realize that I couldn't give him any valuable information even if I wanted to, because I didn't make it my business to know anything and I was glad of that. If the krauts suspected you of knowing something, they had methods of getting this information out of you. There was an English officer among us who must have known something. The krauts were dragging him out of his room every day, and one day, through the peephole of my door, I saw them bringing him back to his room with his face beaten and swollen beyond recognition. He was being worked over like this every day, but they couldn't make heads or tails with him.

I'm glad I didn't know what he knew, because I might have spilled the beans. This interrogating business all seemed silly to me, for everything he asked seemed to know much more about it than I did. For instance, he told me the schools I attended while back in the States. On a map he showed me by tape method the route we took on our fatal mission. Then on another map he showed me the route of the mission that was to take place that day, but it admitted that, even though they knew in advance how our planes were coming, there wasn't much they could do to stop them. They could only hit them off guard, as they did us because we had so much more than they did.

"Then why do you people keep on?" I asked. "You don't have a chance, and this continuous fighting is only costing more lives."

"Oh, but you are the ones who don't have a chance," he replied. "Hitler has a new bomb weapon that is not quite finished, but when it is he will defeat England and the U.S.A. with it." I laughed and told him he was talking through his hat.

He laughed back, and said, "Why don't we just wait and see?" I must have smoked about seven of his cigarettes during my conference with him. Then I questioned him again. "Why bother me on all this stuff?" I asked. "You seem to know more about me than I do. I'll be truthful with you," I continued.

(8)

"I couldn't tell you anything, if I wanted to, because I'd been ill and I'd asleep and I'd been back home at the time."

"This really made him know the same thing, that you were sleeping," he said. "Don't tell me the mother me to be asleep when they immediately need me awake to be there. What do you think those people are?"

Both of us continued about to immediately as we sat in his chair and through the night made up a story.

"You can go back to your room now, I've seen," I picked a pocket in his coat. I slipped the light into my pocket, while getting up to leave. "I'll get the ball into the air. At that time the guard was still in another position."

I didn't miss the momentary of all when I said it. The place was worse. We were taken over the back of the train, and still in my club jacket, I was walking in the street for about five or six miles, and I was every inch of the road. A loud and not that was the first. Together with the other people, I was running back out of nowhere would take my track and taken Germany. The group separated from the track and we had a long way to go. The German population was running away with their two-year-olds. The people, both women and children, parted about in two ways, one blocking and heading us all about the way. The first station was a truly station, and I was certainly glad to station, where we boarded a train. The train was a little later, but I was glad to see it. The train was a little later, but I was glad to see it. The train was a little later, but I was glad to see it.

In the only evening of the first day, the train came at an end, but I was away again. We left the train and walked into the station, and there was no water. I was trying to get water, it was not enough to get the

trying to protect ourselves from the blood-thirsty crowds in the station. The point of a guard's gun held them off.

In the guarded station-house door, I could see at least a dozen krauts sitting around tables with white tablecloths on them. They were guzzling nice ugly nazi bellies. This was a little too much for us. After all, we only wanted water, and they wouldn't give it to take some action ourselves. Several of the guards started the ball rolling by throwing insulting remarks at the guards. The guards attempted to butt them with their hands, but we all got up and moved toward them in a slow

we backed back the bolts on their rifles, and their ugly numbered they didn't dare try taking a shot at us. After all, what did it make? Without water, we were dying a slow death in this way, we would at least eliminate some krauts, though it meant bloodshed.

The krauts realized this, because immediately an Englishman shouted, "Get back all of you, and we'll have you for you shortly. If you don't get back, we'll open fire

stopped dead in our tracks and waited. He kept his head in a matter of minutes he had a large pail of water for us by one of the guards. The pail was set right in the midst, as we all dove at one time, while some with stinking hands pawed into the pail scooping up as generous to us, going back several times to the pail. Each time we would put on a terrific performance, as they stood back and got a big bang. Even the angered civilian population, who spat into the air, was being brought in to us, was being much enjoyed. It was only hoping that our bombers would come over and give them some more entertainment. After my first drink of water, I started to crave food again, but it wasn't long before I was craving water. Nevertheless, I'd have eaten a dead man if someone had handed me one.

on came into view, and as we neared it I
ular wire fence surrounding the camp.
grass around each barracks, making them
his was being well cared for by the pris-
ther G.I.'s like ourselves, were neat and
reasonably contented.

"e it here," were the words shouted to us
into the camp. The Germans at this camp
did like it. They told us that it was up to
owers and grass. Then they took us to the
there the supply room, where, through
merican Red Cross, we were issued a com-
got a brand-new pair of G.I. shoes.

racks wasn't very attractive-looking, but
at least, here we had straw mattresses on
Our only means of food was supplied
parcels. These parcels were pooled in a
opened up three times a day in the mess
ten cigarettes a day. All this wasn't too
to last. We stood formation there twice

ay there, an American colonel who had
ot to build our hopes up too much.
it camp," he said, "and what the future
w. You're only staying here a week, and
o your permanent camp."

king German guards showed no respect
y of saluting, they were very friendly
have been satisfied to fill the colonel's
d by and we hated to leave, but there
had to make room for others, they told
at least now I was clothed decently.

m this camp to the train station wasn't
were well fed and clothed, and in no
ached the station. Our train ride from
ne southern part of Germany. The train
mbed-out villages and towns. Cologne is
remember best; although large sections
ed away, the buildings were still being
as just a mass of broken-up brick piled

here and there. The R.A.F. had been concentrating on this town so much that the jerries couldn't get everything cleaned away fast enough. I was only too glad to get through and out of these bombed towns as soon as possible.

The Germans, mostly in towns of this type, all ran around with brief cases under their arms and appeared to be some kind of executives. They would sit down somewhere, zip open the brief case, pulling out a piece of salami along with some bread and butter, and they'd start eating. So you see, we weren't the only comedians here. They acted like a gang of clowns themselves.

5

We reached our destination safely, and it didn't take long to realize that this camp, too, would be a hellhole to be in. The camp, including the barn with garage-like doors on it, covered an area of about a 150 square feet, with barbed-wire fence surrounding it completely. One foot away from the fence on the inside was the warning wire. It was just a thin wire about a foot high, mounted on small pegs. If you got on the other side of this wire, you were liable to catch a machine-gun bullet from one of the four guard towers that surrounded the camp. There were about three hundred of us in this camp, which was to be our permanent home for the duration. The camp was located about twenty-five miles east of the town of Mainz. Whenever the air force hit Mainz at night, you could see the terrific light flashes in the sky, with no sound effects.

The Germans issued every prisoner a spoon and a clay bowl for soup. I remember the day I held my clay bowl under the dipper to be filled with soup. At least, that's what it was supposed to be. The contents consisted of several dead, slimy maggots. This sight satisfied my craving for food. I no longer wanted it, despite my hunger. Although the food was putrid and we were crammed into a barn like sardines, I still didn't think it was as bad as being in solitary confinement. A near-by prisoner, in captivity longer than I, slobbered up both his soup and my soup.

"I like newcomers like you," he said, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "But you'll probably learn after you're in here for a while."

When General Patton started to drive, he changed the Germans' plans about making this our permanent home. Then ru-

mors, one of a prisoner's worst enemies, flooded the camp. Patton was only twenty miles from here, and we were surrounded by the American armies. These were the type of rumor that spread among us daily. They were very pleasant to hear, but they would only build up your morale for a great letdown. However, once in a great while such a rumor was confirmed. It was true that Patton's armies were on the move, but we also were getting ready to move. On our second week of stay here, the Germans told us to pack and be ready to move again.

That evening, just a little after sunset, the entire three hundred P.W.'s were again marched to the town's train station. I have never before taken so many train rides in my life. This time our destination was somewhere up in the northeastern part of Germany. Most of the trip was detouring and backtracking, because our air force was knocking hell out of their railroad system, and you can't run a train without tracks. On this trip, we were crammed into barred boxcars, with only one entrance, which was so heavily barred that escape was impossible.

The B-24's were making a raid on this particular night while our car was sitting idly by a near-by freight yard waiting for track repairs up ahead. I could hear the deep, weird, growling roar of our bombers in the distance as they neared in our position. The Germans quickly had our car pushed right smack in the center of this freight yard, which was usually an appropriate target, as I remembered from my previous missions. They pulled the engine car away from us and made sure the entrance of our car was securely locked. Like trapped rats, we waited and sweated out our bombers as they crept closer and closer toward us, and a cold sweat came over everyone as the formation now came directly overhead. Then a panic-stricken voice among us shouted, "Here they come! Here they come!" But nothing happened, and everyone gave a deep sigh of relief and watched the bombers as they crept right on over us onto another unfortunate target.

I could hear the guards as they assembled on the outer platform of the barred car. As the prisoners kept a pressed cheek up against the bars and just gazed out into the shadows of the darkness, a guard's concertina enchanted the quietness of the night.

The beautiful tune of "Lily Marlene" that he squeezed out soon put me into a deep slumberland of dreams. I was just about to take a nice big bite from a fat turkey's leg, when the clicky-clack of the train's wheels awoke me. I rubbed my eyes as the rising sun peeked in at us through the bars. We were on the move again.

Two days later the train approached a bridge on the Elbe River, and again the American bombers were on their way. This time they pushed our car out onto the center of the bridge and left it there to be doomed. The good Lord must have been with us, because the bombers passed right over the bridge and kept on going. As soon as they were a safe distance away, the Germans hooked us up to the engine car and we started to move again. There are snakes and rats in the animal world, but there's nothing lower than a human being who has turned snake. These people were so low that they could probably have crawled under a snake. We hated the Germans so much that, if it had been up to us to pass judgment on them, we'd have exterminated the entire population. The young minds were so poisoned and influenced with nazi propaganda that only God knows how long it will take to teach them otherwise.

Berlin was the last big town our train passed through before reaching its destination. Peeking through the drawn blinds, you could see the angry mob, who suspected we were in the train but weren't quite sure. Surrounding them on all sides was sufficient reason for their bitter anger. The town was as badly bombed as Cologne. It was a great relief as the train continued on its rails, through Berlin and on up into the northeastern part of Germany toward Pomerania. This final camp was located about sixty miles west of Danzig and was to be our permanent place of stay. Near it was a very dense, primitive forest, which the people in that region called "the Black Forest." Walking along the roadside and looking into the forest, you couldn't see a speck of daylight, that's how thick the brush and timber is. It was said that nobody knows what is in the Black Forest. You're liable to run into most anything in there. I knew from a glance at the place that I would never attempt escape into the Black Forest. I would surrender first. Although opportunities presented

thousands on our
trying to get away,
have tried to stop
"The Japs are
the men trapped
gate: it read, "Stalag
with four compounds
covered an area of
each compound was
were about ten feet
poked barbed wire.
could see and hear
pounded, as they sug-
gested, "What's the
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"What's on the
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This reception
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"The eight barra-
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down. (I wrote the
we bathed.

hike up the Black Forest
and the krauts acted as
anybody if he did try to
came into view from beyond
on toward it. I looked at
ag Luft No. 4." The compound
Each compound had eight
about a hundred square
was a double barbed-wire
feet apart. In between the
As we entered the reception
the beat-up prisoners from
erly shouted questions at us:
the latest dope?" These were
all the new P.W.'s.
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The barracks that housed us had ten rooms

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ump was a large one,
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om's in it, and each
The barracks that housed us had ten rooms

packed from twenty to twenty-five men. Our particular room accommodated twenty-four men. The room was about fourteen feet square, so you can imagine how uncomfortable conditions were with two dozen men bedding in such a small place. Although some of the barracks had triple-decker beds, our barracks had none, and the floor was our bed. A little black stove stood several feet to your left after entering the room, and one large window directly across the room from the door, which had blackout shutters on it.

Going outside again, and facing left from our barracks, was the mess hall, which stood near the entrance of the compound three barracks away from us. Although we never ate there, this was where the soup was prepared. Surrounding the compound on the inside was the warning wire. The mess-hall staff consisted of a small group of G.I.'s and a few of their selected friends, and the average prisoner, like myself, didn't have a chance at K.P. duty. Of course, we would have gladly accepted K.P. duty at this time. The mess-hall staff was more or less a small clique, and they held their jobs fast. These people would eat the most choice portions of food, and what was left would be thrown in a large vat to be cooked up for us. I hate to admit it, but most of the average prisoners didn't have any special love for this mess-hall group.

Despite all inconveniences here, we had a wonderful news committee. They went under the title of the sanitation committee. Somehow or other, they got the up-to-date war news to us in an undercover manner. I'll probably never know how they did it. Each day an unknown G.I. would mingle right in with the twenty-four of us in our fourteen-foot-square room. Then he would sprawl out on the floor among the captives, while each of us in turn would go outside and watch for the guards. He was equipped with a perfect-looking hand-drawn map of Europe on which he would point out the war news to the prisoners.

The month of October brought cool, nippy weather to Stalag Luft No. 4, so the jerries gave us each a blanket to use. The blankets were old and unwashed. They had a crumby smell to them, but the men used them anyway. Several days later, the undercover man informed us that these blankets had been taken

from the wrappings of dead bodies and given to us. I wouldn't have minded it too much if we were warned about it sooner. I could have soaked my blanket under the cold-water pump outside, and perhaps the coldness would have killed most of the bacteria.

My daily menu at this camp consisted of a cup of kraut coffee or tea for breakfast, and soup which was served about five o'clock in the evening. Each man in the room would take his turn running up to the mess hall at mealtime with an empty bucket, getting it filled with soup, and returning to the barracks. Then a selected man, always the same one, would divide the soup among us. He would use a teacup for a dipper and pour the soup into our German-issued bowls, while we all stood around and watched him like hungry hounds. The start of each week would bring each man a quarter of a loaf of black sawdust bread. This bread, it was said, was made of an ingredient of sawdust and preserved that way for only the Lord knows how long. This bread often came with green mold all around it, but after the mold was cut off, the inside was eatable.

Once in a great while the American Red Cross parcels would get through to us, and when they did one parcel would be shared among four men. On occasions such as this, I felt like a king who was dining. The contents of a parcel consisted of powdered milk, powdered coffee, sugar cubes, crackers, razor blades, canned meats, canned stews, cigarettes, salt, and pepper. Had we received this food regularly, as it was being sent, things wouldn't have been too bad, but the Germans always gave the same excuse — "Your bombers knocked out the tracks just ahead of the Red Cross shipment coming in to you." Yet, while we weren't getting any parcels, I noticed several German officers and guards always flashing and smoking the American popular brands of cigarettes.

Whenever they were available, cigarettes were one of our main sources of trade. The heavy smoker would often trade off his precious ration of food for a ration of cigarettes. I know, for I did it myself several times. It seemed as though a few puffs on a cigarette would, to a certain extent, satisfy my craving for food. The C-ration stew, which was such a horrible dish to the average soldier under normal conditions, was here the top and most delicious item of the Red Cross parcel.

During the long hours of night that lapsed between the 5:30 evening roll call and 9:00 morning call, ten vicious, well-trained police dogs were turned loose in each compound. In case you succeeded in breaking out of the locked barracks at night, it didn't do you much good. These dogs would have torn your limb from limb. During the night the hounds' heavy prancing could be heard around the barracks. You could hear the thud of their huge paws as they brought them down on the ground. To make matters worse, the guards who were stationed in the towers around the compound were either mental- or combat-fatigue cases; they were always trigger-happy. The newsman cautioned us about this and advised that we be very careful in what we said or did.

Some of the outstanding boys who shared the same room with me were Jim Hopper, Frank Murinsky, Texas Jake, Big Tom, Speedy, and John Siegel. Jim Hopper was the man selected to distribute our food. Jim was a well-built fella of medium height and very handsome; at first glance he appeared to be a chap in his early twenties. After becoming better acquainted with him, you could tell from his vocabulary that he was well over thirty years of age. He had a friendly personality and a likeable disposition. He enjoyed having people consult him when they needed advice, and he'd sit for hours discussing the matter with you.

Frank Murinsky was a heavy-set fellow towering about six feet, and he hailed from Cleveland, Ohio. He was a nice guy with average looks. Although he was quick-tempered, he cooled down very soon. He was a picture of cleanliness and health, and, despite the many obstacles, he bathed daily in the small room at the rear of the barracks. Frank feared the thought of lice like a small child fears a bogeyman. He had a piercing laugh like a cackling hen, only in a deep baritone voice. He was a very alert fellow and kept close watch when our rations were being distributed. He'd especially watch Jim Hopper distributing the soup.

Texas Jake, a quiet chap from Texas, was easygoing, with a corny but pleasant sense of humor. He never squabbled or argued much about sharing food rations, as the rest of us did. He'd accept his ration as it came, then sit back and get a big

charge out of the way the rest of us would argue. The boys nicknamed Jake "Tex," and the name stuck with him. Tex and I became very good buddies, and if there was ever a trustworthy friend to be found here in "kriegie land," Tex would have been nominated.

Big Tom was a tall, nervy fella. Tom was a bit bigger than Frank, and that's how he got the name "Big Tom." His hair was coal black and curly. In spite of his nerve and the fact that he was such a big guy, he made very little conversation. Everyone showed respect toward him, and, fortunately, he and I became good friends. He was a friend who was always ready and willing to participate in any scheme I had for stealing food.

Then there was Speedy, who was a former policeman from Cleveland, Ohio. The boys always ribbed him about his police job, but he didn't mind it. He would just laugh it off and go on about his business. He loved Western music and was forever talking about it. Speedy belonged to the same crew and was the best of friends with John Siegel, the Jewish lad in our midst. If all policemen were as pleasant and easygoing as Speedy was, the world would never survive.

Siegel even took a discriminating ribbing while here in the P.O.W. camp. There were several people who hated the Jewish race, and even though Siegel would have had the highest medal of honor, they found fault with him and never hesitated to let him know about it. But Siegel was the meek type of fellow who took it all, until Speedy would usually step in and take his part. Siegel took a liking to Speedy and myself. Several times he brought up the subject of discrimination when talking to me. He always felt free to say what he thought to either one of us. He hoped, perhaps, that he would be able to explain all this silly foolishness just upon him. I don't know how the conversations between him and Speedy went, but I couldn't explain matters to him, even if I tried, because the whole crazy thing confused me as much as it did him. Our conversation would usually end up with me telling him a few traveling salesman jokes, and he always enjoyed listening to them.

I must not forget my friend Lem Hine. Lem was from California and was of German descent. Lem had his legs all scarred

up. He had one scar that reached from his left ankle up to his hip. He got this as a result of air-to-air combat. He was a swell guy, with a corny sense of humor. It sounds corny but true, nevertheless, I've met quite a few boys during my experiences as a P.W. who had corny but pleasant personalities. I don't believe I've ever met a man who hated the Germans as much as Lem Hine. "Exterminate them all," was his opinion, "even if it includes me."

Although I ran into a couple of home-town acquaintances while in prison, the fellows I just mentioned were the friends I shall always regard as being closest to me during my P.O.W. days.

The German guards who continuously made their rounds through our group were mostly air-force men in blue uniforms. However, the one most imbedded in my memory was a German infantry soldier. He wore a green uniform for which we nicknamed him the Green Hornet. He wasn't exactly ugly, but he wasn't cute either. He had a good-sized nose, and his forehead almost ran in the same direction with his nose. He was short but well built, and spoke English very fluently. He wasn't too bad a guard, and didn't seem to hang around much when he suspected he wasn't wanted, but some of the other old wicked bastards made up for him.

"You never seem peeved at us like the other guards are. Why not?" we'd question him.

"Why should I be?" he'd answer. "Most of you are here because you have to be, not because you wanted to be. Well, it's the same with me. I don't understand wars, but I am forced to serve just like all of you—and why? Because there's a handful of crew-loose jerks running the world."

"Hitler's the one everyone else seems to want to stop," we'd say.

"Yes," he'd agree. "I have no special love for him, but your leaders are just the same."

The Green Hornet was one guard with whom we could carry on a conversation of this sort. I don't know why, but maybe the reason was that he owned quite a few acres of land back in the States.

"I used to live in the States," he'd tell us, "and I own a great deal of land in Wyoming." When we'd ask him what he was doing in the German Army, he'd never give us a satisfactory answer. "But I'm going back there after the war," he'd always promise.

Despite the fact that he was an easygoing guard, the P.W.'s would always remark after he was gone, "I'd better never run into that son-of-a-bitch back in the States."

"Ah, put he's not such a bad egg," others would defend.

"That's beside the point," the comeback would be. "He owns land back in the States. We're defending that land for him, so he has no goddam business being in the kraut army." The Green Hornet was friendly toward the prisoners, even though several had a hatred against him which he never suspected.

The vicious hounds that guarded us during the night had a bad habit of getting up on the window sill with their front paws, but Lem would always take care of that. He'd take the sharp razor blades he received through the Red Cross and break them up in pieces. He'd force one sharp edge into the window sill, with the other sharp edge sticking out. The entire sill would be lined with these blades. Then he'd scatter bits of meat in between to attract the hounds. At night when the hounds smelled the meat, they'd hop up on the sill and cut their paws and noses. Early the following morning, at his first opportunity, Lem would remove the blades and wipe off the window sill. He'd look around the ground for bloodstains and would cover them with dirt, so as to confuse the Germans as to where the dogs got butchered. It was a dirty trick, but no dirtier than those the krauts were always pulling on us.

During my monotonous imprisonment at Stalag Luft No. 4, a popular celebrity's son was in captivity with us. I'll call him George for now. George was talented with the art of hypnotism; at least it looked very convincing to me. He was in the room right across the hall from us. I entered his room one evening, after hearing a bit of commotion and laughter from the hallway. George was performing his talents on a fellow prisoner, while other prisoners looked on. I really got a big kick out of the whole thing. The hypnotized prisoner was sitting on the floor with an

empty plate and a spoon in his hand. "You're eating a nice, big, fat, juicy steak," remarked George to the heavy-bearded victim. The prisoner dug into the empty plate with his spoon, as if he were cutting a steak, and brought it to his lips, then munched away at nothing with a very satisfied look on his face. George would always entertain the boys, and everyone respected him highly. He was very intelligent and enjoyed humoring the prisoners.

The next time I heard a commotion come from his room, there was no laughter, but instead the weird screams of a maniac. George had gone completely off his nut, and it took five men to hold him down as he squirmed, bit, and kicked wildly like a mad dog. It wasn't a very nice sight to see, and when he was finally calmed down, the German guards came in to carry him out. His eyes were sparkling like a couple of diamonds when they carried him out. No one ever saw him after that.

Thanksgiving was just around the corner, so we all started to skimp and save on our food ration in order to have that much more to eat on this day of thanks. I managed to save a quarter-loaf of bread, a can of Spam, two hog potatoes, some powdered milk, and a few squares of sugar. On Thanksgiving Day, the American Red Cross got through to us, and when I opened my parcel, believe it or not, staring me right smack in the face, as beautiful as ever, was a large can of turkey. I felt like a king with all this wonderful food, and didn't hesitate a minute in stuffing myself like a pig.

The other prisoners did likewise, but it didn't pay off. Our stomachs had been so badly shrunken that a decent amount of food like this only made everybody as sick as a dog. That night I rolled uncomfortably in my sack and so did my stomach. I felt as if I just wanted to die and never see food again; then it all started to come up. I jumped up from my sack but I couldn't make it to the latrine at the rear of the barracks. I sprayed the front door of the barracks, with puke coming out in the same manner that water comes out of a fire hose.

The dysentery feeling drove me toward the rear of the barracks, only to stumble blindly in the darkness into a line of already waiting G.I.'s, and the two bowls had already been oc-

d. We pleaded with the guards to unlatch the doors and
it us into the large outside outhouse, only to be told to do
business in our pants. This pain and horrible sound of moan-
went on all through the night, in which time the floors and
ay of the barracks were all mess- ed up. If you felt a little
after heaving, the terrible smell th- roughout the barracks
you sick all over again. After bei- ng let out of the barracks
the compound the following morn- ing, you couldn't get a
in the outhouse, had you bought th- most expensive ringside
in the world. Some were sitting, le others buried their
in the commode bowls. No sir, I'l- whi- ver forget the Thanks-
g of '44. ne

In a place such as this every man is strictly for himself. This sort of living and hardship showed what a human being is really made of. If you didn't look out for yourself here, nobody else did. Tex was the only man I remember in my entire captivity who still showed a bit of respect for others, and I wouldn't have trusted him too far with any of my food. It just goes to show you what starvation can do to men, even the best of them. However, if the krauts caught you stealing, they would shoot first and ask questions later. Theft was considered one of the lowest crimes among the Germans, but what did the stupid asses think a starving man was supposed to do if the opportunity of stealing food presented itself? In some respects, the krauts proved to be broad-minded. On the other hand, they would lead you to believe they lived continuously in the valley of ignorance.

A week had lapsed since our wonderful Thanksgiving dinner, in which time there wasn't too much fuss or squabble over food. The novelty wore off toward the end of the second week, for when Jim Hopper was dividing the soup in our bowls, he would make sure we got the thinnest portion and he got the thickest. Murinsky called this to my attention, and the others angrily agreed with Frank.

"This baloney has been going on long enough," Murinsky warned. "I don't care what the other fellas think, but fill my bowl up to the rim like yours."

"You fellas chose me to distribute the chow," replied Hopper, "and if you don't like the way I do it, get someone else to do it."

He didn't have to repeat himself a second time, because the men immediately selected two candidates, and, like the Dem-

ocrats and the Republicans, held an election. Murinsky nominated himself, so he was a candidate. The men cast their votes, and, surprising as it seems, Murinsky was elected for the job. He did all right for a couple of days, but he also started to think a little more of himself and pulled the same thing Hopper did. I guess it's just human nature for a person to think of himself first.

The month of December and its bitter coldness made living conditions worse. It felt as though an air-conditioning system had been installed in the outhouses. The krauts began supplying us with a ration of seven pieces of coal a day. Murinsky and I took advantage of this. We would heat some water on the stove in cans, then we'd go to the rear room of the barracks and strip naked, soaping ourselves from head to foot. In turn, we would pour the warm rinse water over one another. Despite the fact that the water was warm, the broken windows in this room aided very much in making us get dressed quickly and out of there.

The prisoners became quite familiar with many of the guards who made the rounds throughout our barracks during the day. Some of these guards would trade us matches for cigarettes, for matches here in "kriegie land" were pretty precious too.

"How about getting me a three-day pass," Murinsky would joke with one of these guards.

"Heh, heh," the guard would laugh. "Never don't be so foolish," as he made an exit through the front door.

"Heh, heh, never don't be so foolish," Murinsky would mock. The more we'd laugh, the more he'd display his skill impersonating the krauts. "Vat have you been carrying in your ship?" He'd re-enact his part of interrogation with the Germans.

"Nothing but bombs," another P.W. would say, aiding Murinsky in his act.

"You peeg, dog, American svine, you lie, but ve vill make you tick, ve vill have to geeve you perhaps a leetle mistreatment."

"What are you going to do with me?" questioned the other G.I.

"Take off your pants, peeg," Murinsky would say, dropping the German accent. "We are short of women, anyway, and you will do."

Though Murinsky got a lot of laughs from us for this sort of

entertainment, I doubt very much if he'd ever make a real actor, but that's what made it all the more fun, his poor skill in acting. The men would often give him a round of applause, and he'd bow and accept it as if he were some great celebrity who had just won an academy award. He also took advantage of displaying his humor with another small, stupid-looking guard who usually made the rounds through the barracks. This guard was a short air-corps man, who always had a silly-looking grin on his face. Everyone was quite positive he couldn't speak English, and that's all Murinsky had to know.

"Was is los?" was what Murinsky would usually start the conversation off with.

Then, "bla, bla, bla," the guard would start with, always with that stupid-looking grin on his face. The two would carry on a conversation, with Murinsky speaking English and the guard speaking German, and neither could understand what the other was saying.

"You no-good son-of-a-bitch," Murinsky would say, in a laughing tone of voice, as if he were saying something friendly.

"Ja, ja," the guard would answer dumbly, and throw a few words himself. All this time we were almost splitting on the inside, trying to keep from laughing aloud, and Frank would keep it up all the more.

"You like to suck, ja, ja?" he'd go on. "I geeve you something good to suck, you silly-looking little bastard."

The guard, still with the silly grin on his face, would stand there conversing with Frank. What he was saying, in turn, I'll never know, but for all we knew he may have been pulling the same routine on Frank as Frank was pulling on him.

I've seen many a man in normal army life sleep with his wallet of valuables under his pillow, and we kept this a rule here at Stalag Luft No. 4 also. However, instead of money, it was a hunk of bread or a couple of hog potatoes or cigarettes under our pillows. I forgot what it felt like to pack a wallet, and it didn't make any difference because you couldn't eat money.

It was about this time that another enemy moved in on us—lice. These were the most annoying little monsters in the world,

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talented in baking such cakes. He'd throw some powdered milk, sugar, chopped black bread, and anything else he could lay his hands on, into a can. Frank would mix all these ingredients together, then put the can on the stove to bake. Regardless of how putrid the cake turned out, he never wasted a crumb of it. For the benefit of the housewives who'd like to have the recipe for that delicious salt and pepper soup, just fill a dirty old can with water, add a lot of salt and pepper, stir well while cooking to prevent burning, then serve piping hot. For more delicious P.C.W. recipes, write to Frank Murinsky.

I'll never forget the time Big Tom and I peeped into the rear window of the mess hall, and what we saw was very startling. The mess hall clique, for whom we had no special love, were preparing themselves a meal. They had a small grill on which they were frying large pieces of horsemeat in the same manner as steak is prepared. They had gobs of mashed potatoes with plenty of gravy and onions to go with it. A German guard joked and laughed with them while they were preparing their meal. After taking their choice of meat cuts, they threw the rest into a large vat to cook, then added a few scraps of vegetables. This soup was what we got and very little of it. These are facts that Big Tom and I witnessed ourselves; that's why I'm stressing this scene. I want you to know the truth. The talent these jokers had for cooking would have turned up my dog's nose at the sight of it. It wouldn't have looked half as bad if they were krauts, but they were G.I.'s and captured prisoners like ourselves.

After witnessing that little exhibition, the two of us walked around to the other side of the mess hall, where we discovered a pane of window glass broken out and replaced by a piece of cardboard. The rest of the window was covered by a large piece of burlap, concealing whatever was on the other side. Big Tom worked the cardboard loose from its tacked holdings, and I quickly squeezed my arm through and felt around until my fingers fell upon a pile of neatly packed loaves of black bread. I pulled out a loaf, then Tom pushed his arm in and brought out a loaf, pulling down the cardboard, burlap and all. Fortunately no one was aroused, and we walked away from the scene at a slow pace so we wouldn't appear too conspicuous.

man friend entered
 Frank, "if it isn't ol'
 et me pissed off," he
 e up and bring this

to blab on in his na-
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There was a lot
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lowing. I believe
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rest of the compa-
ny of us in all
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wooded area to
set only a little
road on its right
side, we took a
all villages with

7

The days that followed brought new
were starting to move and rumors such
allies, and Uncle Joe will be here any
have taken Berlin and have surrounded
talk was only rumors. Yes, rumors were
every day during the time I spent in
remember one day that went by that so
come about, and they always did more

Nothing of much interest happened
of January. The weather-report man de-
firmed the rumor that the Russian army
and moving rapidly northward. He pointed
drawn map how the armies were moving
I realized that, when and if the Russians
gap would remain from there to the Baltic
the Russians continued their drive in which
be free men or in the hands of allies—if it
and I guess we did at the time. The catch-
thing from the Russians, but if they did
the gun would be taken from our back
manage to survive. But with a gun in my
pretty rough to steal food.

We sweated and sweated it out, but
Russians encircled Berlin, then stopped it
began concentrating solely on the town of
of January, somebody must have guessed
cause it started to move again. They
without a satisfactory explanation, stopped

to spare, the majority of them wouldn't give you anything for nothing.

I noticed an elderly lady in among them. I made my way to her and began conversing with her in her native tongue. She was old enough to be my great-grandmother, and, judging from the wrinkles on her face and her hunched-over appearance, I would say she was about eighty years old. She had no teeth, her hair just ran wild, and her clothing was a burlap sack. The woman was uneducated and gave me the impression that she was mentally ill. I couldn't help feeling sorry for her, even though there was nothing I could do. She knew nothing about her family, or where they were or whether they were still alive. What little energy was left in her the Germans accepted to aid in their forced labor policy. I continued conversing with her as Tex listened. But, truthfully, our conversation made no headway. She offered a loaf of black bread for two bars of soap I had in my possession, and I accepted without questioning.

"Why do people like this have to get all mixed up in this ugly warfare?" questioned Tex. "It's almost like putting an infant out on its own to struggle helplessly along in the world." I made no comment, as the two of us entered the barn where we equally divided the bread.

As the darkness of night blotched out the day, a guard's voice rang out through the barnyard. "Everybody inside for the night."

Then we were all crowded into the U-shaped barn. Every man teamed up with a bed partner because one blanket was issued for every two men. Quite a few of the men had extra blankets that they had stolen from the Germans, but the heat from each other's bodies would help keep them warm. Tex was my partner on this march, and we agreed to share our food. That night, though very cold outside, everyone was comfortably warm because the barn was so jam-packed. It was warm, but we slept with everyone else's arms and legs sticking in our faces. Unfortunately, I had to go and go bad, but the exit door was about fifty feet away from me, with prisoners piled all over.

I nudged Tex. "I've got an appointment to keep outside," I told him, "so how about staying awake so you can guide me back by talking loud?"

"Okay," he laughed, "but you're going to be late." I started toward the door, but my hands touched the floor of the barn, for it was so packed that I brought my hands or knees down to my face or stomach. The food language and names I heard were humming.

"Sorry, sorry," I'd say, every time I'd paw or

"Sorry, your goddam ass," was the usual response. I was only halfway through, it seemed as if the barn was awake and grumbling.

"Where's the door?" I shouted in the darkness.

"Over this way," answered an unidentified voice.

"Keep talking," I said.

"Okay, but you better shake a leg. I'm not all night talking."

Amid all the other grumbling voices, I followed the unidentified one's voice and successfully reached the door and the outside. About ten minutes later, my mission. Everything was quiet as I began to crawl. Apparently Tex had fallen asleep because he wasn't moving. The doors behind me were closed, and I started to crawl, again waking everybody in the place.

"Tex, Tex," I continued shouting, but Tex was a sleeper to be able to hear me.

"Wherever you are, Tex, wake up and guide me," other voices cried in the darkness.

I continued crawling blindly for about an hour. I lost all sense of direction and the barn started grumbling and complaining. I just slumped down with my head on somebody's leg and my feet or chest or stomach and went to sleep right there.

Toward the end of the week our death march proceeded into the western part of Germany, some of about twenty-five miles a day. Our Red Cross was exhausted, and the food situation became desperate. The Germans didn't give us a pinch of food. Our source of getting food was by either stealing it

from the villagers or displaced persons. The fortunate ones whose valuables were not confiscated were able to do business with the villagers and forced laborers. If you didn't have a valuable—such as watches, rings, etc.—to trade for food, people would walk away and have nothing to do with you. Of course, included the French, Polish, Italian, and American laborers. They always seemed to have been well paid for food, which they made us pay for dearly.

Some of them, however, were the biggest schemers I have ever seen. Some people took our G.I.'s for everything they had in the barn, a crumbly piece of bread, but what could you do with a wrist watch if your belly was empty, and this was the only thing you had? You couldn't trade you a piece of bread in trade for it? You couldn't trade a watch for a piece of bread, and this is how a lot of valuables went.

The G.I.'s like myself, who had no valuables, would use their art of stealing. The German farms where we were hidden for the night had potatoes stored in the ground. I looked forward to this as my main source of food. A prisoner would go about stealing food in this way. He'd pretend he had to go outside at night to keep an appointment. The guard would let him out, and the prisoner would go over to one of these potato hills, where he'd dig up as many potatoes as he could drop his drawers and in a perching position he'd dig into the potato hill and obtain as many potatoes as he could carry. He'd pull up his pants, tucking his shirt into his trousers. Then, tightening his belt, he would hurriedly dig into his bosom. Then, in the darkness, a guard would come to his living quarters. If you were caught doing this, you'd get killed on the spot, depending mostly on the guard that caught you. Most of these guards had no sense, so I would have hated to have been caught

in the barn, I would usually munch on the raw potatoes, peel, dirt and all, in the darkness. I didn't mind. I'd eat what I was eating anyhow. This method was all right for some of our layovers, but often a farmer would complain about latrine conditions on his property. "You've got to dig slit trenches at this place," the guards

and we knew that stealing food there would be impossible. For digging and recovering trenches of this sort, we were our tools. Each trench was about a foot or so wide, a couple of feet deep, and about twelve feet long.

The men would usually hunt up or make a couple of Y-shaped posts. They'd drive one post at each end of the trench. They'd lay a long post reaching from one Y to the other resting in the open sections of the Y's. This made a very comfortable seating. However, it didn't pay off for Frank, as he sat down one day on the post when another prisoner at the far end sat down to the coldress. In doing so, he accidentally turned the post in the Y, use it. In doing so, he accidentally turned the post in the Y, sending Frank toppling over backwards and landing right smack on his right shoulder in the slit trench. He came up with his whole one side covered with human manure and very angry. He grabbed the post and twisted it again, in an attempt to send the other prisoner toppling over in the stuff. But the other G.I. was on guard and jumped up quickly, holding with his two hands on to his trousers.

"goddam son-of-a-bitch," shouted Frank. "Where's your brains? You must have dropped them in the slit trench."

"I'm sorry," pleaded the other prisoner, still with his trousers I'm sorry." past his knees. Frank stood up and walked away from the trench grumbling, but the other fella didn't sit down again until Frank was a safe distance away from the trench. Although I felt sorry for Frank, I couldn't help laughing about it, as he washed his clothes under a pitcher of cold water that one of the guards brought out from the farmer.

The distance between Swinemünd and the Baltic Sea was now only a couple of days. The farms we encountered at this point of the march housed more Russian forced laborers than any other kind. Our next stop proved to be a place of this sort, and, like all of the other displaced persons, they charged us dearly for food. There were signs of bitterness between the Russians and the Americans at this place, and it might have been tragic, had it not been for the point of the German guard's gun, who'd break up the arguments.

The German guards showed more favoritism toward us in cases of this kind, and the Russians almost always got the worst end of the deal. After leaving this last place, I noticed one of the Russian forced laborers mingling right in with our group. After all, he's an ally of ours, we figured, so, in spite of it all, some of the odds and ends we carried in the way of clothing were given to him. He quickly slipped on the clothing and soon looked like one of our own G.I.'s. He was making an escape and, by mingling in with us, he would not be noticed or caught as easily.

When the strenuous day's march brought the column to the next farm to rest for the night, he showed his appreciation for what we had done for him. We could have gotten some food from the forced laborers at this place, but he warned them in his native tongue that we carried a lot of valuables such as rings and wrist watches and we were desperate for food, that we would trade our valuables for a mere loaf of bread.

"Don't give them anything for nothing," he warned one of his fellow Russians. "Make them pay for it with the valuable keepsakes they carry." And that's how it was.

The bitterness amongst the prisoners started up again, so the Germans removed the Russians until we were ready to pull out.

It was Friday morning, I think, and the gap that the Germans were so desperately trying to get us across was about thirty-five miles away. The column began marching somewhat earlier than usual that morning. The position of the Russian armies were uncertain, and it was now or never the Germans figured to get us across this gap. I don't know who it was that once remarked, "An army marches on its stomach," but here was one army that definitely was not marching on anything but its feet.

The prisoners reached the gap all right, and a small boat was waiting for us. They loaded about two or three hundred of us at a time on this boat and took us across a small river. They went back and forth in this manner until the entire eight thousand of us were taken across to the other side. Once on the other side, and still dragging, falling, and crawling along, the men were marched a few miles farther until the German captain in charge was informed by some of the native inhabitants that the nearest farm was still about twenty-five miles away. With a group of weather-beaten, starved men like us, they would never make it.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

and cold and I thought I would never
 h. Nobody was successful in the way
 night, and as our little party of three
 rain kept accumulating on top of the
 ued seeping through the blanket onto
 was heaping full and weighted down
 brush gave away, sending blanket,
 of us, soaking the three of us through

the killing us a slow death," complained
 started dancing about to keep from
 him in his little dance for survival,
 with pulled-up collars did the same.
 ld be heard quite clearly throughout
 t moved on into the wee hours.

to a stop just a little before dawn,
 re fallen out into ranks a comfortably
 aking wet, the column started march-
 e air as the sun began drying off our

around, our column was fairly dried
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 along until one was located. This,
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is," I said to Frank, as we crawled back over the corpse. "He's probably better off than we are."

"I don't know and I don't give a damn," replied Murinsky, "but I'm not gonna stick around and question him about it. Come on, let's get the hell out of here." We made our way out of there and back to the other barn in the same manner.

Frank, Tex, and I would often hitch onto the sick wagon with one arm, and it would more or less pull us along as we walked. This helped quite a lot in preserving our energy, and I thought the idea the Germans had for confiscating a horse team and wagon like this was a good one, until one day one of the wagon's sick patients changed that idea. I was pretty well exhausted as I clung to one side of the wagon. I didn't notice soon enough one of the wagon's sick patients hanging his head over the side, and "burrup" he vomited, sending the foul stuff splattering over the side, right in my face.

"Oh boy, warm food," I could hear one of the prisoners alongside of me say in a joking tone of voice, while others laughed heartily. I pulled my handkerchief out, which was almost as stiff as a board, and wiped off the stinking slop at it trickled down my forehead and in between the cracks of my lips. This taught me a lesson I never forgot, and never again did I hitch on to the sick wagon.

farmer's livestock. The dust had almost settled when the German commandant ordered the group back to the road. We proceeded into the village where the column, as usual, was broken up.

The property owner where our group was stationed had all the facilities necessary to prepare meals for a large group of men. These facilities, which included a large cooking vat, were housed at the extreme rear of the barn. This section was partitioned off from the rest and had its own entrance. I didn't realize it yet, but this equipment was to become of great use to us.

Less than fifteen minutes after our arrival, a dozen German guards came down through the dusty road from the direction where the bombs fell. They were dragging the carcass of a dead horse that was killed in the recent explosion.

"We have brought you some decent food, for cigarettes," they propositioned us.

"How many cigarettes do you want for the horse?" questioned Frank.

"One hundred will be sufficient," replied a guard.

"Okay," replied Frank, taking off his helmet liner, "I'll see what I can do." He passed it among us, the prisoners who still had cigarettes in their possession tossed one or two of them in the hat as it passed by. When Frank thought he had covered everybody in the yard, he came forward with the hat and counted the cigarettes in front of the guards.

"Fifty—that's the best I can do," he told the guards.

"Oh, but fifty is not enough," argued the guard. "There are twelve of us, remember."

"Well, how about selling us half the horse?" Frank pleaded.

"Just a minute," replied one of the guards, as they went into a small conference, then agreed to sell us half. Their spokesman pulled off his bayonet and handed it to Frank.

"Here, cut him up and hurry—now give me the cigarettes." Frank gave him the cigarettes, then bent over the horse and began carving, while a couple of us helped him by holding the horse's body.

He carved out a whole side of the horse, then handed the bayonet back. We carried our portion into the barn and tossed it into a large vat. The guards picked up the remaining portion

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of the horse, and made their way over to another near-by barnyard to another group of prisoners.

We threw some water, potatoes, and other odds and ends into the vat, then started a fire. Soon the pleasant aroma of soup filled the air. The men were impatient, but in due time we had a whole vatful of delicious horse soup. I was enjoying my soup, when Tex called to my attention a couple of beautiful Polish D.P. girls peering in at us from behind some shacks just across the road from our yard. The girls were dressed in burlap sack clothing and motioned for us to come over, then ran back to the shack.

There was a long wooden gate between us and the cobblestone street; the shack was on the other side of this street. It was a little north of the gate with a side entrance that was hidden from our view.

One guard was pacing back and forth in front of the gate, and in order to get to the girls, you had to steal past him. With the thought of food always in our minds, Murinsky, Tex, and I decided to get over to the girls. Each man would wait until the guard's back was toward him, then one at a time we'd scoot over the fence across the road and into the female's quarters. I was the last to enter, and the girl closed the door behind me. The only lighting in this room was from the rays of the sun that came through the window. As I joined Tex and Frank at the table, I noticed a cupboard just above the homemade table. The table was set against the left wall entering the shack; up against the second wall was a long bench with a window on each side of it. There were three odd chairs, and the room measured up to about twelve by fourteen feet in size.

"How long are you boys staying?" questioned one of the girls in Polish.

"Just for the night, then our column moves on in the morning," answered Frank, then questioned, "Where are you girls from?"

"Warsaw, but we've been forced laborers of the Germans for three years now." As the one girl spoke to Frank and me, the other one seated herself snugly up against Tex, who had just walked over and found himself a seat on the bench. She started

to speak to him in Polish, but Tex didn't understand a word she said.

He looked down at her and said, "H^ovesie bread?" (Have you bread?)

"Yes, we have bread," she replied, motioning to the other girl to get it. The other girl reached across the table to the cupboard. The long stretch almost forced her tits to fall out from behind her burlap wrappings. Everything but the nipples were exposed. She drew back with a loaf of plack bread and set it on the table.

"You boys don't have to leave in the morning, if you don't want to," she flirted.

"No, you can stay here with us," added the other girl. "Where will we sleep?" questioned Frank, as his eyes showed more interest in the bread than her.

"We'll worry about that at bedtime," she persuaded, "but come now and sit down for a while and rest."

Frank sat right near the bread while she took my hand and led me to the near-by bench. Tex shoved over and we sat down, with her in a snuggling mood.

"You boys must be tired," she went on talking, while still holding my hand.

"And hungry, too," I replied, getting up and making my way toward the bread. Frank had already found a knife in one of the drawers and, while cutting the bread, he said, "You girls don't mind if I take a piece?"

"No, go right ahead," was their reply. "We get all the bread we want."

"Fine, fine," replied Tex, also making his way to the table. "You won't mind if Tex and I split the remaining portion," I went on.

"No, go right ahead," said the one, as Frank handed me the knife and stuffed his share into his bosom. I quickly cut the remaining portion in half, handing Tex one piece. Just as Frank had done, we crammed the remaining share in our bosoms. I believe the girls were slightly angered, but they tried not to show it. Evidently they were craving romance, but we were craving food.

We eyed the room all about thoroughly in hopes of finding more food, but never once did we co-operate with the girls in their pleasant scheme. What fools we were, but that's a starving man for you. The fairer sex didn't interest us in the slightest. To me, it was like talking to another man, although the girls were beautiful. We accepted the girls' invitation to stay, but at present it was only in the interest of escaping and satisfying our craving for food. Then perhaps after a few days of decent eating, I believe we would have started to take interest in satisfying their craving for romance.

They were still trying to promote themselves with us when a loud knock came at the door. We immediately became silent as the girl who hung onto Tex got up. She walked over to the door and opened it just a little bit. She was suddenly pushed aside, and the door was flung wide open. Two German guards forced their way in, and while one held us at gun point the other commenced searching the entire group. The bread we had in our possession was taken from us and tossed on the table, while the two frightened girls huddled in the corner. The guards escorted us outside and back across the road to our farmyard. They then made their way back across the road and disappeared into the girls' quarters for the night.

"Well, anyway," sighed Frank, "though we didn't get what we wanted, at least the girls will." Things of this sort went on quite often during the march, where a guard would barge into the quarters of a female displaced person to spend the night. And I don't believe he was playing checkers with her all night either.

The changeable weather of March still saw our column moving slowly but surely into the eastern part of *Deutschland*. The winds were terrific. Marching with the wind wasn't too bad because it would push you along, but for a weak, beat-up crew like we were, it was plenty tough marching into it. It made the distance seem twice as far, but we struggled along with guns at our backs, wind or no wind. There was absolutely no privacy here. You just pulled off to one side of the road, did what you had to, while passers-by looked on and usually giggled, but they were strangers to us, so it didn't make a bit of difference. The big-

gest nuisance, though, in this situation, were the March winds. It was hard to keep your balance unless you were an acrobat or contortionist.

Dysentery was another great nuisance and killer. I felt sorry for an unidentified prisoner who had just contracted it. He dirtied himself so that his trousers had to be changed, and here we were way out in open country with no shelter within miles. He received an extra pair of trousers from one of his comrades, and he was permitted to pull out of ranks off to the side of the road. To watch him as he quickly removed the dirty trousers was humorous, yet serious. As he shivered as he wiped himself off, the wind persisted in blowing. As he held a clean pair of trousers in his left hand, a strong gust of wind snatched them from his trembling grip and carried them a short distance. Bare-assed, he ran desperately after the trousers as the wind settled them down on the ground. Everybody felt sorry for him, but couldn't help laughing as the tricky March winds still persisted in tugging at the pants, making it difficult for him to slip them on.

The next barnyard we stayed at accommodated more French prisoners than any other. Most of these places, throughout our march, housed more of one nationality than of another. To the right, entering through the large driveway gate into the yard, was a long rectangular-shaped garage. It was partitioned off with two-by-fours into six sections, with each section large enough for an average-sized automobile. Directly across the driveway yard, running in line with the garage, were hedges. The hedges ran from the road back to the barn. The barn extended from the hedges on past the rear of the garage a little ways, with about four feet of space between the barn's front and the garage's rear. This alley ran into another side road. If it had not been for the space, the two buildings could have formed a large L.

The French prisoners here were at liberty to roam all over the entire village. One would usually come up as far as the gate or around the side to the hedges, where he'd trade with the American prisoners. The bread he carried would always attract the captives, who would swarm to him like cattle as he would schemingly examine the valuables they offered him in trade for the bread.

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He usually wasn't satisfied with an average twenty-dollar watch alone, but usually got his price. I noticed a small girl of bread, and he usually got a loaf of bread almost as big as she was. Coming up the road with all gathered around the hedges bargaining with the French. I called her over and flashed a small ring that I had won in a penny grab bag. Whether she was hesitating as to whether to trade me the loaf of bread for it. She was just about to accept, when the other prisoners noticed us and swarmed around and immediately brought out an expensive diamond ring and handed it to her in trade for the bread. "You dirty mother-loving bastard," swore one of the other prisoners, as he squirmed his way back through the crowd and entered the barn.

"Why didn't you kick him up?" said one prisoner. "Let's go in and get him," argued another, while I slipped my finger and walked into the barn. I stopped and glanced at him as he sat in the shadow of the barn and peered back at me like a scared rat. I proceeded to the other side of the barn and lay down on the straw.

I dozed off and didn't get up until late morning the following day, when I was aroused by a lot of commotion in the barnyard. Evidently, without explanation, the Germans were keeping us under investigation another day. I went outside to investigate to the other side of the barn and found an unfortunate prisoner tied to the garage.

"What's going on?" I questioned a fellow prisoner. "That dirty bastard was caught stealing potatoes from his own buddy," he answered, while holding a G.I. belt wrapped around his knuckles.

"Please," begged the unfortunate one, "I was hungry. I'll never do it again; he can have the potatoes and bread I have." But his plea was in vain, as the first man stepped forward and gave him a lash across his bare back with the belt. The others began to follow in turn, and the swish, swish echoed out, hitting the back, screaming like a woman. Some blows caught him on the neck and face. His screaming while others caught him on the neck and face. His screaming

was weakening and died out as he began to breathe. The whipping ceased, and he was released. He dropped to the ground, while blood mired from his nostrils and settled in a puddle around his cheek.

I didn't know whether to feel sorry or not for him, but I had been caught for something we were all guilty of about among ourselves. It could have been any of us that he had stolen, food that perhaps I had kept as a keepsake for. On the other hand, it would have been tough on me to keep from stealing even from another starving person if the opportunity presented itself. I don't believe anybody would be angered by this cruel method, but I'm sure that the men who participated in this act must have been clean souls, without sin. I often wonder what they would have done if an opportunity such as this one presented itself. I remembered the words: "Honor thy father and mother, let him first cast a stone at her." I don't know, maybe this group of prisoners was absolutely sinful, and I'm sure they are today are probably doing more wrong than anyone else. If any one of them ever comes across this story, he'll know to whom I'm referring, but you, the reader, will probably never know.

Malnutrition was certainly taking greater effect on Muriel and Tex. Every day they looked more and more like the wall I probably looked dead. I'm glad I didn't have a mirror, because I was the most beaten up of the three of us. He spoke no foreign tongue, which made it much tougher for him to obtain food. I was waiting for him to drop any day.

It was the latter part of March, and the column had a ten minutes more of marching time before reaching its destination. Tex was completely exhausted and he tried to talk to his feet. When he tried to talk to my shoulder, his tongue fumbled for words. I put his hand on my shoulder, and together, for those last few minutes, we staggered to the farmyard destination. With many others we slumped down on the cold barnyard ground, where everyone rested for a few minutes, then crawled or staggered to the barn. Or

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"Suck my toe," replied the southerner, "you go sleep by that elephant yourself if you want, but I've had enough show-ers for one night."

The thumping continued and so did the complaining, but there was nothing anyone could do, so the G.I.'s just made a joke of it all, even though only a few were successful in the way of getting any sleep.

The guard we called the Green Hornet was still somewhat of a main attraction, even on the death march. He and a companion would always make it their business to stop and visit the female forced laborers staying at the German farms. Most of the time they'd make their way into the *Fräuleins'* quarters where they'd spend the night. But sometimes, depending on what sort of farmer we encountered, such a thing would be too risky. So the second best place to take a girl was up in the hayloft above where we bedded.

Whenever any prisoners were bedding in the hayloft at a time like this, he'd tell them to go downstairs. The men would usually go willingly and never told his superiors about it. The Green Hornet was clever and successful with his psychology. He would often toss a couple of loaves of bread to us that he himself stole from the farmers. Sometimes he'd give us a few cigarettes from his own ration. For these reasons, the prisoners always co-operated with him in his sexy schemes. Most of the women he had relationships with seemed to like him very much. Usually upon his departing from her, she'd show great sentiment for him.

"How about you boys going downstairs?" I heard him ask several of the other captives one day, as Tex and I lay unnoticed in one corner of the hayloft, covered with straw from head to foot. The others went down, but we held our ringside seat and watched what would happen.

It was beginning to get dark outside, but in the barn it was still fairly light. Thinking he was alone with his companion, the Green Hornet tossed his field pack over to one side, in our direction, and began making with the love. From where we were peeping we could only see the top portions of the two bodies.

Their two heads were in our view for a few minutes, then his head slid down to her already nude breasts. Incidentally they were very nice. He sounded like a baby who didn't have its milk for a month. His head soon disappeared from the picture, and now all we could see sticking up out of the hay was the top bare portion of a beautiful woman.

I couldn't see from where we were if her eyes were closed or what color they were, but I could sure hear her breathing. Her arm was moving in a manner as though she was caressing something below her waistline. I believe it was his hair. Then her arm stiffened as it appeared to take firm hold of something. I could see her large breasts move around like jello, then faster, faster, and faster. "Moan, groan, h-m-m-m-m," sighed from her lips. Then everything went silent and motionless as the darkness of night slowly hid them from our view. Soon we couldn't see a thing in the pitch blackness. However, the rustling of hay and the heavy breathing went on into the night. He was so busy with his companion that he didn't hear me as I crawled up to his field pack and slipped out a piece of salami and some German cheese. Tex and I gobbled down the food, then soon dozed off fast asleep.

This woman also showed great sorrow upon the Green Hornet's departure. He must have had a good time, too, because he didn't miss his salami or cheese. I looked at the Green Hornet, and it convinced me that he was the greatest and most successful lover in the world.

Tex's prediction of colder days ahead came true as the column mercilessly continued to penetrate into western Germany. The mercury bobbed around zero, and I missed having my shirt quite a bit. Our death march kept going until it came upon some wide-open spaces, where again we were at least twenty-five miles away from the nearest village at bedtime. This time the men were marched off onto a large vacant area of countryside. A strong wind persisted in blowing as it carried with it a fine dust of snow. As the snow continued blowing down through your collar onto your bare back, the prisoners quickly spread their blankets on the ground and huddled under them. Tex, Frank, and I teamed up while the guards encircled the area. You could only lie on one side for a few minutes, because the coldness of the ground came right up through the bottom blanket like nothing.

"Why don't these lapper dans just shoot us all and get it over with?" bitched Frank, while gnashing his teeth so it sounded as though they were being ground down with a file. "I'd crucify every one of these mother-loving, son-of-a-pig bastards if it was up to me." Then we shifted over to the other side. "God damn," he went on, "this ground should be getting warm from our body heat soon," but it didn't as we continued our shifting ordeal through the night. My left hand was exposed to the biting wind that night, and it commenced getting worse as we marched along. Several days later my thumb developed a steady throbbing pain and swelled up to twice its normal size. Although a captured American doctor was with the column, he was too busy and it was difficult to locate him for the time being. I left things

go for several more days and just hoped for the best. It only got worse, and the pain became so terrific that I couldn't help moaning in my sleep at night. The infection worked its way past my elbow and to my armpit, where it developed a large lump the size of a golf ball. The Germans ignored all this, and it was up to either me or my friends to get the doctor to me, otherwise I could suffer the consequences.

"I think I'm gonna lose my arm," I told Tex in my agony, "and I'll be darn lucky at that."

"Don't talk like a fool," he encouraged. "You'll be in perfect shape as soon as we get the doctor for you." Although Tex had been too disgusted to go on awhile back, he and Frank were now desperately trying to locate the doctor for me. While the search for the doctor continued, I'd always manage to comfort myself with the thoughts of the many successful people in this world minus limbs. These sort of thoughts weren't bad, until I'd start thinking of perhaps passing on to the next world, then my hair would almost stand on edge.

Tex finally managed to find the doctor and brought him to me. Immediately he dipped a small pair of scissors into a bottle of iodine, then poked the points in a ripping manner into my balloon-like thumb. The puss whipped past our faces and shot up about six feet into the air, as the fingernail began flabbing around like jelly.

"I don't know how much good this'll do," he commented, while bandaging the wound, "but keep your arm in a hanging position as much as possible so that it can drain steadily." He didn't have time to stay around and give me any prescriptions, because of the countless number of other patients he had to tend to throughout the column. The poison began draining very nicely from my system, and the itching feeling that followed assured me that I was on the way to recovery.

The firing and bombing from our side were now becoming heavier on Germany, and American planes were being seen more often. Whatever the heavy bombers missed, the fighter planes would swoop down and strafe. The strafing of these planes would chew up everything or anything in their way. On several occasions they mistook our movements for German troops, which, of

course, resulted in a few casualties and deaths when they swooped down and strafed hell out of us. Although it was a horrible mistake, there was nothing the Germans enjoyed more seeing.

The beginning of April brought the fighters swooping down on us in such an incident. The column had ceased marching for the day in a village that was about sixty miles away from the town of Hanover, Germany. The prisoners had already been divided into groups and marched into their respective barnyards, when a squadron of American P-47s spotted us and mistook us for Germans. The fighters dove as low as fifty feet from the ground and began strafing. The guards dropped their guns and together with the prisoners scattered like wild flies.

Tex was in a perching position with dropped drawers when this all came about. As he jumped to his feet and ran for shelter, I noticed a puddle of blood on the ground where he was perching. He wasn't hit though, it was just blood he started passing through his bowels. As the hail of bullets whizzed all about us, I ran into a barn where already a group of prisoners were all piled on top of one another against a concrete wall, and every man trying to squirm to the bottom of the pile. I jumped on the pile and tried the same, while desperate fists punched at my face and I in turn returned the blows as I successfully managed to reach the center of the pile.

The intense firing and chewing up went on for at least a half hour, in which time one guard and two prisoners were killed. Several others were injured, but they recovered. If only they had known it was us or checked closer on these matters, it would probably have saved a lot of unnecessary lost lives. You can well see why we weren't exactly happy to see our own fighters at all times. Sometimes, though, the fighters would at first make several investigating passes at the column, then, realizing it was us, they would come so low that we could see the pilots waving at us, as they dipped their wings. Whenever this occurred, I couldn't help thinking, as probably many of the others were thinking, "Gee, those pilots are so close," I would think, "yet they're free men and here we are captives of the krauts. Why couldn't they send over helicopters," I'd go on thinking, "with

hanging ladders? In that way they could probably pull a lot of us out of this hellhole into freedom." On second thought, this was no good either, because the prisoners were so desperate that every man would probably have tried to climb up the same ladder at one time. This, of course, would have resulted in the pulling down of the plane, thus adding another prisoner to our death-march column. Although escape was almost impossible, this type of thinking would help keep up your morale, and I went on doing so as the long, steady, dragged-out days of endless marching progressed.

When the column reached the next old, dilapidated-looking farm, it didn't take long for me to observe that we had been long waiting for. The rear part of the yard was surrounded by a ten-foot wire fence, supported by round posts that were about five feet apart. The Germans took it for granted that the fence was enough of a barrier at the rear of the yard, so the guards were all concentrated on the front and outer part of the lot. Murinsky noticed this opportunity also, for he nudged me and said, "We've always been looking for an opportunity to escape, and here's our chance. Once we get over that fence, the rest would be easy and we could be out of here and on our way. As soon as we get about five miles away from this dump, then we can lay over for the night and do all our traveling by day."

It would have been quite simple to evade the Germans by day traveling, because the night curfew forced all German refugees to travel by daylight. Therefore, while the night was dead, the daylight found all its many highways in *Deutschland* cluttered up with these people. There were old and young, and most of them were traveling by horse-drawn carts, while the less prosperous ones were pulling hand-drawn carts and evacuating by foot travel. Many of these people were clothed in American G.I. clothing, and that's why we would have stood a good chance of escaping.

Once on our way, the food problem would be but a small obstacle to us. We were desperate and planned to obtain food from the displaced persons we'd encounter, whether through friendliness or force.

Our plans were made, but Tex disagreed. "Don't be foolish,"

We've come this far already before the Americans of sense, but, to us, they couldn't convince us along. "Gee, I'm only," he pleaded. "If they But to us escape was

I throughout the yard, a hunger. This was to attention away from the fence, as Tex stood sing went as planned, the post of the fence. over the fence, where stomach, while wait-

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hopped over a small um estate with plenty tting through the pas- quick right turn with- t ahead. My run came ing soft that felt like stuff before I stopped

"Help me, Frank," I shouted. "I stepped into some quicksand or something, but I'm not going down any more."

"Ho-ho-ha-ha-ha," he began to laugh like a baritone cackling. I was a bit provoked at him, but said nothing as he laugh- ly spoke. "That's manure from cattle," he said, as I shook the off of my feet. I didn't smell bad enough as it was; I had to into that mess, but it was the least of my worries at the e. They say poison fights poison. I thought perhaps the smell ould do the same, but it didn't. The odors more or less col- laborated with each other. I smelled twice as bad now.

This incident convinced us to change our course a little until we came to another small fence, which we scaled. A short drop off from the embankment of the road took us right smack onto a rail- road track. The night was a bit nippy, so Frank and I decided to go on up the tracks a ways in hopes of finding shelter. The tracks led to a small station house to our left. We should have stopped and pulled off to the side then and there, but we were per- sistent in getting past the station and finding shelter.

We barely got past the station house when a guard's voice rang out, "Halt!" stopping us dead in our tracks as he stepped out from behind the station. He said something in German, but the only two words I could understand were "American svine." In his left hand he held a flashlight that he continuously kept squeezing so as to generate the battery. As the beam kept bright- ening and dimming on our scared faces, I noticed a German lug- ger in his other hand staring me in the face. After he finished reading us off, he ordered us to turn around and start back down the tracks. He kept kicking us both in the pants, in turn. Evi- dently his foot must have gotten tired, because he swatted us from the rear a few times with something that felt a lot more solid than his foot. However, we made no attempt to dodge his blows, but kept our arms high in the air. It wasn't exactly the wisest thing in the world to dodge an angered guard's blow when he swung at you. He may have become more angered for missing and perhaps blow your brains out for it.

Thank heaven, he finally got us back to our barnyard, where he turned us over to the proper authorities. They quickly checked our dog tags and were already planning our punishment. I don't

outside though, and in between the L in order to be able to peep in through the open window into the chicken coop. The guards, of course, weren't aware of what was in this barn; they were more concerned in watching that no one escaped.

It was fairly easy to climb through the large open window, once the guard turned his back. I climbed into the coop, and every chicken in the place began cackling and fluttering around. They were excited and made me excited. I pushed several of the hens from their nests and grabbed the eggs from underneath. At the same time I was busy collecting eggs, Murinsky and a few other prisoners had discovered a room above the hayloft where the farmer kept his smoked meats.

I was successful in stealing four good eggs and a wooden one, while Frank came down from the hayloft with several choice cuts of meat, including half a ham. I noticed he stuffed something under the hay beneath him, but it wasn't until the next day, when he couldn't carry it all, that I found out what it really was. He gave Tex and me a share of it, and when we reached the next village, we cooked it over an outdoor flame. The ham was sizzling over the open fire, while other prisoners, who were making salt and pepper soup, looked on in amazement and envy. It was right after this wonderful meal that I felt an irritation in my throat, but I paid no attention to it. I took it for granted that the change of weather was just making me feel a little uncomfortable. As I lay down to bed for the night, the irritation became more annoying. By the time morning rolled around, it felt like somebody was using a welding torch in my throat all night.

I marched all that day and the next with the burning sensation in my throat as steady as a toothache. The doctor was finally contacted on the third day. He checked my throat and just uttered, "H-m-m-m."

"What is it, doc?" I questioned.

"I'm not sure but it looks like tonsillitis. You wait here until I finish with the others," he said, as he continued to care for the other sick. I misunderstood him and returned to my group, where I joined Tex and Frank in the barnyard.

The doctor went on checking all the others, and when he

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finished he asked, "Where's the fella whose throat I just checked?" I don't know why, but at first I ignored him.

"He means you, Ed," said Frank.
 "Oh, hell on him," I replied. "I'll be all right, it's only tonsillitis."

"Where's the fella whose throat I just checked?" repeated the doctor, now showing a bit of anger in his voice. I still remained silent. Then again: "The man whose throat I just checked better come up here, because he's got diphtheria, and if he doesn't let me take care of it, he's going to die." He no sooner finished this remark than I was on my feet making my way to him.

"Come with me," said the doctor.
 He took me to the German authorities and explained to them what I had. The authorities listened, then gave him permission to isolate me from the others. Two of the guards led me a little ways down the road to another barn. When I entered the place, the size of it and the quietness all about gave me the creeps. The guards closed but didn't lock the door, and returned to the other barn.

I spread my blanket on some hay and lay down, to rest. Shortly the doctor entered and placed some spuds and bread alongside me.

"You'll be all right, fella," he encouraged, as he patted me on the shoulder and departed through the door.

I lay still for a while, then got up and wandered outside where I discovered there weren't any guards posted about. I had every opportunity in the world right now to take off and make an escape, but I felt too miserable. Despite the misery, I still had that prisoner appetite. The thought of the potatoes and bread still in the barn drove me back inside. By morning the food was all eaten up. As the sound of the prisoners getting ready to move reached my ears, I began to think, "It's funny they're getting ready to move, yet no one seems to be concerned about me. Perhaps they're just going to leave me here to die; then, on the other hand, what if a couple of guards drop behind and come in to blow my brains out? They'd bury me, then send back a report 'killed in action.'" With these thoughts soaring through my mind, I quickly hopped to my feet and made my way outside, where I

squirmed in with the rest of the column who were just beginning to move.

The burning sensation in my throat didn't ease up the slightest as the march continued on its way. I've heard diphtheria was a very bad thing to have, also hard enough to pull through under normal conditions, let alone the condition I was in. I was desperate, thinking that someday I might see home again; and the remembrance of seeing the cold dead stare on the faces of other men who passed on made me keep going that much more. I was almost certain my number was up. There were so many others who had died, and I was no exception. It was only a matter of time now, I thought, until they would be hauling my carcass in a cart covered with German luggage.

As breathing became more difficult, I could see by the expression on Tex's face that he, too, thought I would kick off. Although he didn't say anything, his attitude made me mad. "Why does this jerk have to look at me as he does?" I thought. "He's probably in worse shape than I." But Tex was only feeling sorry for me, and I knew he would give his right arm if there was anything he could do to help.

Tex, who was too disgusted and weak even to steal food for himself, was now snooping around and successfully obtaining food from somewhere. He'd share this food religiously with me. I guess it was because of actions like this that I've always had the greatest respect for Tex. Even Frank, who wasn't really a bad guy, had disappeared into another section of the column when the chips were down. He left the two of us to stick it out together.

I was so desperate to get out of this hellhole alive, and fought the sickness so much, that it seemed as though the pain became less annoying, even though it still felt as if the Empire State Building was stuck in my throat. They say, in due time, a person can learn to enjoy poor health by getting used to the feeling. This is what was happening to me.

Our struggling column of beaten prisoners marched until finally we reached a large transit camp. The camp was several times larger than our permanent camp and accommodated prisoners of all nations. The column was marched in and passed by a

large warehouse, where we made a left turn and continued in through several compounds before we reached ours. Our own compound had no barracks, but large tents set up all around like an Indian village to accommodate us. Although the compounds of different nations were all partitioned off, you were at liberty to visit them all. The British, however, were housed in the same compound with us.

By the time our column reached this camp, many of the prisoners were minus their shoes because they had been traded off for food, and the men walked around with burlap wrapped around their feet.

"You are at liberty to visit all the compounds," a German authority told us, "and you can also go into the Russian barracks, but I advise you not to."

Prisoners evacuating from all over Germany were marched into this camp daily, but, as usual, only to stay a while, then be on the move again. During our week of stay here, we visited the various barracks, such as the French, Slovak, and Russian. The French barracks was the first Tex and I explored. Entering from the rear, there was a big fifty-by-fifty square room. Built in the wall to your left, about halfway inside, was a small room used as a dispensary. There were no beds or hallways; you just stepped over and between the bodies to get around the barracks. The French prisoners were all sprawled out on the floor, and they looked worse than we did. They appeared to be in desperate need of a bath, even though there were washing facilities in the rear of the barracks. The aroma of dead fish was all about the barracks, and there were no signs of extra food around. There were no signs of bitterness between us, yet they weren't too talkative. Perhaps everyone was too disgusted to say anything. We left through the front entrance and wandered over to the Slovak barracks.

I was the first to enter, and my eyes almost fell out from what I saw. Here was a group of prisoners that were probably better off in captivity than they were at home. This barracks was spic and span. Their clothes were clean, with creases in them that could cut your hand. Naturally, their equipment was all American merchandise; the American food and cigarettes here

were plentiful. Even though they didn't care for us or any other prisoners to enter their barracks, the valuables many of our prisoners still had in their possession always caught their eye. We accomplished nothing there, so we left and headed over and into the Russian barracks.

These barracks were just about all built on the same order. The Russian barracks, though, didn't seem as bad as the French. They at least had triple-decker beds in it, and every bed was occupied. I thought of the Germans cautioning us, but I had no valuables to worry about, so Tex and I entered their barracks. It was like being on Times Square on a busy day. Their medical attention was far worse than ours. I noticed sitting on the edge of a bed a Russian Mongolian, whose foot had been cut off about two inches above the toes. It wasn't bandaged, and little string-like veins dangled out of the rotten-looking wound. He looked up at us through his ugly slanted eyes as if he would cut our throats just as soon as look at us. He didn't say a word, but his stare told us we weren't welcome. I didn't feel sorry for him or any of his friends because of previous experiences with his kind.

We went on past this ugly creature's bed into the sleeping quarters of another even uglier Mongolian. This one had his leg knocked off at the knee. Though I disliked these people, I will give him credit for what he did. He had whittled by hand with a penknife a very satisfactory artificial limb to replace his real one. He was about as friendly and talkative as his comrade, so we wasted no time with him either. We made our way over to another corner of the barracks where a group of white Russians were engaged in a game of cards. Everyone just stood by in silence while another group of American prisoners entered. Like fools, we tried to strike up a conversation with these baboons, only to be ignored. There was one man among them who wasn't too homely, but the black patch he wore over his left eye was very becoming to him, because he and his friends looked like a bunch of cutthroat pirates.

As the card game progressed, one of the American prisoners brushed by us and passed over to the Mongolians. He then flashed an attractive-looking pocket watch to them, in hopes of trading it for food. The Mongolians immediately showed great

interest, as one of them got up and walked over to the took the watch in his hand as if to examine it. Nodding as if undecided, he passed it on to another one of his friends to be examined. His friend passed it on to another, and so it went. Before the American realized what was going on, he was minus a watch. That was the last any of us ever saw of the owner of the watch ran around desperately trying to get it back, but it disappeared in the crowd and he didn't get a crumb of bread for it.

"You might as well let it go and forget about it," Tex advised the unfortunate one. "These bastards are liable to cut us up if we start arguing, but we can't say we weren't warned by the Germans." The enemy had warned us against our allies, but they refused to heed their advice, so we had to pay the consequences. "Allies or no allies," complained the unfortunate one, "I'm keeping away from those mother-jazzers—from now on."

The week end didn't roll around soon enough, and I did I wasn't sad at all about leaving this camp. I don't know exactly where in Germany we were at this point of the march, but from talk I knew we were still somewhere near Hanover with the zigzag and back-track marching, our journey up brought us all the way from Pomerania to Hanover, approximately two thousand miles on foot. To get a better figure on this, the column traveled some seventy-odd marching days. An average of about twenty-five miles a day—which brings the figure fairly close to the two-thousand mark. You can well see for yourself that the prisoners certainly covered plenty of ground during this torturous death march. Yet there was more ground to be covered by foot, and God only knows when or where we'd wind up. The death and sick toll was getting worse, and many of the boys just couldn't go on any more and the drawn wagons were jam-packed. The Germans confiscated the other horse and wagon, but it, too, was soon piled full with sick.

The skinny, undernourished animals struggled along pulling these wagons, when suddenly one of the horses dropped and died. This sort of sight was fairly common in war-torn areas, many because of the terrific burden put on these animals. Even a horse could only stand so much, and, believe me, every horse I

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saw in this country was in poor condition. They looked a little like we did. You could count every rib in their bony bodies and a little potbelly popped out below. This may sound funny, but it's true. Normally, I didn't have a potbelly, but I did here in captivity, and my joints seemed to expand to somewhat larger than normal. Yes, these animals and ourselves had a lot in common, when a prisoner died he was buried, but the horse's body was always eaten up. The Germans didn't waste anything. I wonder why? So now, with the horse gone, this wagon had to be pulled by the puny prisoners.

Although many of us were pulling and pushing, the wagon moved along like a turtle with a broken leg; nevertheless we managed to make it to a very busy T-shaped section in the road where the column was brought to a halt. The German command in charge called the American doctor out of ranks and spoke to him, as we all sprawled out to one side of the road. After a short conference, the doctor turned about, and, with words being relayed to us down the column, he said, "The sick group will leave us here; they're going to be taken to a hospital. It's not too long a distance from here, so any of you on the wagon who feel strong enough to walk, please get off and make room for the sicker ones, and those who are able to walk will have to help push the wagon."

"Go show him your throat," Tex said to me, and he didn't have to ask me a second time. I quickly made my way to the doctor, who looked at my throat. He didn't recognize me from before, but after taking one look at my throat he ordered me in the sick group to be marched to the hospital.

Murinsky was somewhere in the rear of the column that day, so I didn't get to wave goodbye to him.

"Take it easy, Ed," Tex shouted, as his lips revealed a pleasant smile. "Maybe I'll see you back in the States some day," he said as our small column of sick slowly started to move up the road away from them. "It won't be long now," I thought, "and I'll soon be home." I turned and took one last look at the column as it slowly moved past the intersection of the road. This was the column that Tex was in. They should have just marched through the whole shebang along with us, I thought, because they all looked like a punch of zombies to me. Our beaten band of sick cor-

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road, desperately pulling the sick wagon. We'd pull a bit, then rest a pit, and inch by inch we made it to another small village that was as yet untouched by war.

I glanced about, but noticed there wasn't any hospital here, as promised. Instead, there was a large barn that was the center attraction of this village. Out in front of the barn was a giant Red Cross flag, laid out on the ground. There was a driveway that ran downhill off to the left of this barn. The yard was set in a dip. Across the drive from the barn was the estate of the farmer who owned the lot. The end of the driveway ran into another barn. This barn had an open section something like a hallway running through it, which took you on the other side of the yard. There was a water faucet in this section, with an entrance into the barn right next to it. This barn was a long one, with many partitioned sections to it that ran in the same direction with another drive that took you out to the side road.

The farmer's livestock was kept in the different partitioned-off sections. Across the drive, a little ways behind the Red Cross barn, was the farmer's garage which housed an expensive black sedan. Here there were British and American prisoners mixed, bedding in the two barns. We unloaded and gathered around an English captured officer who had a few words of encouragement to say to us.

"Your worries all over now, boys," he said, while twisting the ball of his foot into the ground. "The English tank division is only about twenty miles away from here, and they'll be here tomorrow." He continued, warning us, "You can wander around pretty freely here, but don't wander off too far because you're safest right around here. Our armies know we're at this spot and they're gonna be careful coming through, but if you wander off someplace else, you're liable to get hurt." With these words of advice, he left us and returned to his own group.

The farmer who owned this property and his wife supplied us with food. They were very generous, bringing us an inbetween snack of fresh milk every now and then. There just wasn't enough they could do for us in the way of hospitality. Living here wasn't bad at all, even though it wasn't a hospital.

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Two days went by, and still no tanks showed up, so on the third morning, which was the 21st day of April, I wandered around the yard for a while, thinking, "If they didn't come yesterday or the day before, as predicted, they probably won't be here for a week yet." Then I glanced over at the lone German guard who was slowly walking around with his hands clasped behind him, and he was very friendly. He was an elderly air-corps man and the only one of the German Army in sight. I guess he was more or less left behind to turn us over to our own authorities because I walked up to him and passed him by. He nodded his head and smiled to me as I passed. He didn't say anything, so I kept on going until I was out of the yard and on the road. I made a right flank and started down the road, feeling free as a bird.

I had a lot of time with nothing to do, or any appointments to keep, so I went on exploring like Marco Polo. Several hours later I came upon a small country bridge. A young German teenager in uniform was walking guard over the bridge. The rifle strapped to his shoulder was almost as big as he was. He slowed down to a stop when he saw me, but made no attempt to bring his rifle down from his shoulder. His appearance slowed me up a bit, too. I looked at him, and his face had a puzzled expression on it. He didn't know whether to smile or not. He was just as scared as I was, but he had the gun.

I grinned at him like a cat and said, "*Haben Sie Zigaretten?*" He dug in his pocket and brought out a pack of Turkish cigarettes, and offered me one. I took it and started a conversation with him, reminding him constantly that the Allies were due there

today, and he agreed with me, saying, "*Nicht gut, Deutschland kaputt.*" I realized, then, why he didn't shoot me in cold blood. I'm only glad that this lad realized how close their defeat was. I often wonder what he would have done if he thought otherwise. Thanking him, I started across the bridge, still not certain of what would happen. He didn't bother stopping me, and, as my back was to him, I crossed my fingers and prayed he wouldn't get any crazy notions. It was an uncomfortable feeling until he disappeared from view behind me.

It wasn't long before I came to a little dilapidated shack that housed a family of Polish D.P.'s. They saw me coming and recognized me as an American. An elderly woman stepped out of the shack and invited me in. I entered the shack, and seated around the table ready to eat were the father and a son of about seventeen years of age. I was seated at the table on a wooden box, and a big bowl of beans cooked in gravy was placed in front of me. As we ate, the people began to tell me about the great love they had for the Americans and how they hated the Germans. I don't know really what they were talking about, for I was too busy eating. After stuffing myself like a pig, I picked up and moved on to do some more exploring.

I didn't get very far up the road when everything came up, beans and all. Wiping my mouth on my sleeve, I continued up the road until a nice-looking red brick home, which resembled our own American homes quite a bit, came into view. I walked over to the fence that stood between the road and the yard. Standing alongside the fence I watched a young *Fräulein* who was chopping wood with her back to me. When she turned and saw me, she must have thought she was looking at a ghost. She fumbled nervously for words as I asked for food, then, still very much frightened, she smiled and called her mother, who quickly came out of the house. She recognized by my clothes I was an American. She quickly invited me into her home and set her table with expensive ham and good rye bread. As I ate, she, too, told me of the great love she had for Americans. She knew the Allies were near by, so she pleaded with me to stay at her home until they had gone by.

"They won't hurt us if they come through here, will they?" she asked.

"No," I assured her, "don't worry about it."

"I'm really from Minnesota," she told me. "I lived there for some time until the war broke, then I came here." She even owned property in Minnesota and intended to return after the war.

"What made you come back here?" I asked.

"I just came for a visit," she lied, "and had to stay when the war broke out," she contradicted herself. I listened as she talked, but my interest was more in the food I was gulping down like a hog.

Most of these people would lie and tell you anything to win your friendship, knowing the Allies were near by. As I was leaving, she again begged me to stay, but I felt too free to stay in any one place for any length of time.

"Don't worry," I told her, upon departing. "Nothing is going to happen—just sit tight and wait." Thanking her, I went on about the village, exploring some more.

As I continued up the road I noticed seven figures coming down the road in a hurry. It was too late before I noticed they were German infantry soldiers. I had no alternative but to walk toward them in hopes of they wouldn't try to stop me. I didn't have to worry, though, because they were half scared to death and ignored me completely as they kept on going right past me. Each one of them carried a tank-buster grenade in his hand, as they continued down the road. They were very nervous and kept looking back over their shoulders.

On the opposite side of the road, in bare feet, pushing a wheelbarrow with their belongings in it, came a man and woman who were Polish D.P.'s. I yelled to them in their native tongue, "How's everything going?"

"Oh, half and half," the man remarked, when a burst of machine-gun fire cut loose in the distance over the hilltop ahead of me. The two people froze in their tracks for a second, and as the firing ceased momentarily, I continued talking, but they dropped everything and made a dash for the woods. I stood stunned and puzzled for a minute, when suddenly a giant tank made its appearance over the top of the hill ahead of me. They were about three hundred yards away from me, and I didn't know whether to sing or go blind.

The tank stopped for a minute to observe the road ahead. They spotted me in the distance and cut loose with machine-gun fire. I don't know how they missed me, but I bit the dust as I never had before. I jumped into a ditch off the side of the road and must have crawled about a hundred feet with a steady flow of hot lead zipping over my head. In this ditch I crawled over the tank-buster grenades those seven Germans dropped while fleeing, but I kept right on going as my throat burned up with dryness. I made it to the gate entrance of a near-by barn, then made a mad leap in the air and over the gate in an attempt to get into this barn, but I was too late. The doors were just being closed behind the seven Germans, who were as desperate as I to escape this intense firing.

My next best bet was the rabbit shed, which had wood stacked behind it higher than the shed itself. I made a lunge for the shed and forced open the weak doors and crawled in. While I was still on my stomach in the shed, with my face buried in rabbit manure, I pulled the door shut again as the rabbits excitedly crawled over and around me. The tanks started rolling down the road again, and the deep grinding and roaring came closer until it sounded as if they were going right over the top of the shed. "Why in the hell didn't I listen to the British officer and stay put with the others, as he advised?" I thought. "Here I've sweated out all this time living like a rat, and now it'll just be my tough luck to be killed by our own forces." But I would have nobody to blame but myself. Many a boy had lost his life for doing a foolish thing such as I had done. The tanks continued shooting up everything in their way, and as they passed the shed I pushed open the door a little. The first thing that caught my eye was that great big beautiful white star on the side of each O.D.-colored tank.

They were American tanks operated by the British 11th Armored Division. I pushed open the door and the rabbits and I came out together. The rabbits went their way, and I went mine. I stood on the side of the road, continuously waving at the tanks as they passed by. The British soldiers threw cigarettes, apples, oranges, and even eggs to me from the tanks. I must have had enough food to start a grocery store. The friendly greeting of "Hi ya, Yank," came from every tank as it passed me by.

The tanks came to a stop, and the medics jumped out and made their way to the barn where the seven Germans had entered for shelter. The doors of the barn were all chewed to hell from machine-gun bullets. They went in and came out with five of these Germans on stretchers. The other two were shot up, but able to stagger out to the meat wagon with the aid of the medics. As they lifted one of these soldiers off the stretcher to get another one, I could see where the bullet had entered his back. The clothing was sucked right into the wound, and you could see where it came out the front of him where the clothing was ripped and standing out in a pointed manner. He was still alive but in great pain. As his eyes rolled sort of hazy-like and were wide open, I thought to myself, "It's a damn good thing I didn't make it to that barn after all. I'd probably be laying on a stretcher right alongside of him."

As the tanks waited to move on, these English boys hopped off and poured some gasoline on the ground. They lit it, set a large kettle of water over the flame, and soon we were all having a spot of tea, including me, right there in the middle of the road. These boys were well supplied with everything. They even had a scale with them, and I must have answered a million and one questions concerning our treatment as prisoners.

"Looking at you," said one of the soldiers, "you guys must have had a hell of a life."

"Well, it's all over now, Yank," another encouraged. "You'll be well taken care of now, and soon you'll be back home."

"Say, Yank, come over here a minute," others called, as they brought a camera down from the tank. I think I posed for pictures with everyone in the English Army.

Then a big bruiser stepped forward with a scale in his hand. "How much did you weigh before you were captured?" he asked.

"One hundred and seventy-five pounds," was my reply.

"Well, how about hepping on this scale?" he asked, "and we'll see how much weight you lost." I stood on the scale and watched the needle bob around and stop at one hundred and nine pounds. "Don't worry, Yank," he encouraged, "we'll have you fattened up in no time."

"I'm in good shape compared to some of the others," I told him, as he spoke again.

"I understand there's a whole group of you boys within this vicinity. Whereabouts are they located?"

"About five miles down the road." I informed him, as the tanks started to move slowly down the road again. It looked like there was an endless line of them. I didn't know we made that many tanks in America. Believe me, it looked like every piece of machinery ever built in this country was in that small village that day, but that was just a drop in the bucket. I don't know how far the Germans thought they would get against such terrific fire power. I've never seen so much equipment in all Germany as I had seen that day. In fact, I'd never seen so much equipment in all my life.

The walk back to the others was quite a distance, so I jumped onto one of the tanks and rode along with them. As the tanks passed the German lady's house where I had just eaten, I saw a crew of soldiers fighting a blazing fire atop her roof. The chimney and a large portion of the roof had been blown off. She was standing on the road and, while crying aloud, held her daughter to her bosom. After assuring her nothing would happen, I felt like a heel. But who was I to assure anybody of anything? She didn't notice me on the tank as it passed by, and I wasn't exactly willing to face her for the moment.

"Boy, you guys chopped up everything in sight," I told one of the riders. "You were even shooting at me."

"Well, that's because the boys are pretty pissed off about the old man's death. That's the colonel who was in charge of this outfit up until a couple of days ago," he went on. "We came in and took a small village with little resistance, and we treated the people swell. They acted very friendly toward us, but when the colonel was getting down off of his tank to make the routine occupational procedure, a bullet from some low snake of a sniper hit him square in the head and killed him instantly. We all thought the world of the old boy, and after this happened, well, I guess the anger still hasn't worn off the boys. That's why these Germans are really catching hell from us, and they know it."

As we neared the group of P.W.s I had left, I could see them now swarming out of the barn like a bunch of cattle, running

and jumping up and down with joy alongside the tanks as food was handed down to them. These were the happiest faces I've ever seen in my life. I hopped down from the tank and joined this happy group of mine. The men built fires all over the lot and began cooking over the open flame.

A small group of ugly Mongolians soon showed up from out of nowhere and acted like they were doing us a favor by sharing the food and fires with us. While the rest were too happy for any kind of revenge, these Mongolians went into some of the German homes and began looting them. They stripped the farmer down to his underwear and wore his clothes out of the house. Although the English gave us and their own soldiers for identification cards, they ignored these Mongolians and told them to be on their own, which was too good for them. From the impression these few ugly baboons gave, I could just imagine what had happened to the towns the Russians had captured. I'm glad the English reached us before they did because, though they were our allies, the Russians disliked us and they never hesitated to show it.

There were souvenirs of all sorts picked up by all the prisoners that day. From a near-by wooded area, every new and then, a group of German soldiers would come out and surrender. The men would take their weapons and keep them for souvenirs. The remaining Germans were afraid to show the slightest opposition. A group of them even surrendered to an unarmed prisoner who went wandering into the woods alone. There were seven of them, who immediately dropped their guns and threw their hands in the air as he approached them. The prisoner picked up several of their own rifles and brought them out on the road.

I was near by and he tossed me a gun, asking, "How about giving me a hand in guarding these krauts until I find a stockade?"

After searching them for other weapons, we started marching them down around the road in hopes of finding a stockade. Three unwelcome Mongolians attempted to loot the captives of their cigarettes and valuable keepsakes. The Germans begged us not to let the Mongolians take their keepsakes, but I did better than

that. I was holding a gun, so I made these slant-eyed snakes give back cigarettes and all to our German captives. There was a slight resistance until I cocked back the level of my gun and threw a shell into the chamber. I almost felt like killing them even after they put everything back, and the other P.W. G.I. stood by with his gun ready for action. They knew we meant business, as they walked away grumbling in an angered tone of voice. I had no special love for the Germans, but I just couldn't see taking advantage of helpless men. We marched the prisoners around for at least an hour looking for a temporary stockade until we finally found one.

Although most of the boys were picking up all sorts of weapons for souvenirs, I didn't bother to get anything because I was worried about my throat and couldn't even wait a few days, as instructed, for the trucks to come and pick us up.

The following morning, with roads busy with G.I. trucks, I started on foot to make my way farther back into the lines. I hitched a ride to the next village. In this village a bus-hauling system was already set up. They were hauling other P.W.'s back to the Allied air base, and I got there just in time to join a truckload of other unknown P.W.'s. I barely climbed into the truck with them when a bottle of cognac was handed to me. I took a snip and got feeling pretty good. From this one bottle of cognac the whole truckload was drunk.

We arrived at the air base singing like mad. The truck was pulled alongside a Sterling English bomber. The engines were already in action ready to take off. We quickly piled out of the truck and into the bomber. Minutes later, with no loss of time, the ship was ripping down the take-off strip and slowly lifting off the ground, taking us back to England to be shipped home.

A few hours later the plane was taxiing down a landing strip somewhere in England, now far away from the war. It wasn't long after we departed from the plane that the whole group was marched into a nice warm shower. As we left the shower and entered another room, we were sprayed with white delousing powder. This powder was sprayed under our arms, between our fingers, toes, and all other necessary places on our bodies. Our old

clothes were all burned and new ones issued. Everything was really happening fast. This was all done for us by the English personnel, who couldn't have treated us better. They did all they could for us, then turned us over to our own authorities, who immediately hospitalized us and put us under observation. Three months later I was in a group being marched to Southampton, England, port of embarkation, where, together with many other ex-prisoners, I boarded a ship, and we were on our way home.

As I watched the ship cut its way through the waters of the Atlantic and England slowly disappearing behind us, I heard an unidentified prisoner say, "Yes, sir, we're going home now, and everything is going to be just like it used to be. It's all over now. We may have gone through hell on earth, still I honestly believe that I wouldn't trade my experiences for a million dollars."

I turned to him and said, "Maybe you're right, but I wouldn't take a million dollars to go through the same thing again."

Our ship sailed into the night and slowly made its way toward these beautiful United States of America.