

# Death March Medic

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*Flight Surgeon*

ILLUSTRATED BY SGT. LOUIS S. GLANZMAN

**F**or you the war is over." The first German officer I ever saw told me that, only a few minutes after I had bailed out of a B-24. We had been on a mission over Vienna with our squadron, the 719th Sq., 449th Bomb Group. We had been hit hard by flak on the way in but managed to make it back to Yugoslavia where we had just bailed out.

But like many of his countrymen, this superman was wrong. For me, the toughest part of the war was just beginning. I was on the verge of a unique medical experience. Less than a half hour after the "war was over for me," I was applying a splint to my copilot's broken leg and my new job had begun.

The next day one of our gunners was brought into the jail where we were imprisoned. He had been bleeding from a nasty scalp wound ever since bailing out. I stopped the hemorrhage. My next patient was the bombardier who was carried in to the jail with a groin injury. Then a friendly guard sneaked me in to see one of our brave allies, a Yugoslav Partisan woman in the next cell. She was dying of erysipelas (contagious) and endangering the other

women in her crowded cell. Without medication, I was powerless to help her. Later on the German officer in charge refused to help her on the grounds that she was a Partisan, hence she was not "civilized," and therefore not entitled to medical attention.

It was in this jail that I gave my first lecture—a lecture that I was to repeat dozens of times in the following months. The topic?—It was that close, but treacherous companion of mankind that has devastated armies, that carries a wallop like an atomic bomb, and that during his career has killed millions. It is that dreaded carrier of typhus fever, the body louse. (He itches too). This dangerous animal that previously had been something out of a textbook to me soon became a part of our daily life. The routine of picking lice off our clothes became as common as washing our teeth had formerly been.

The Germans soon sent me to Luft Camp IV in Pomerania. This will be remembered as the camp where Allied airmen were bayoneted en masse and bitten by police dogs. There were about 9,000 AAF gunners there and a few hundred RAF enlisted men.





*For thousands of captured airmen the 600-mile march from the Eastern Front was an odyssey of disease and death. AAF doctors in this grim cavalcade had little to work with except their courage and medical skill*

True, it was a domain of heroes, but from the medical standpoint it was a kingdom of illness. Heroism has its price. First of all, there were those who were wounded, burned, or maimed in aerial combat. Secondly, there were the numerous casualties ranging from irritability to outright insanity. Thirdly, there were the routine illnesses to which any large body of people are subject, including large numbers of skin cases and diphtheria sufferers.

Five Allied doctors were on hand to handle this tremendous sick load. My job was to take care of the 2,400 men of Section "C" —sanitation, sick call, and hospitalization. (As a squadron flight surgeon I took care of only 500 men and had the best hospitals in the world behind me.) The prison hospital, although fairly well supplied at times, was pitifully small. Only the sickest cases were admitted. Others were treated in the barracks area.

Air gunners can do more than shoot. Many of the hospital wardmen were airmen who were trained on the spot. They made good medics. Our buddies in the RAF were good too. These fellows were intelligent, learned fast and worked hard. They worked at Section C Dispensary, where they changed dressings many hours daily, treated minor ailments, and could even spot a case of diphtheria.

Of the many unusual medical incidents occurring at Luft IV, one should go down in history. Doctors often wonder how much of their teachings are absorbed by seemingly indifferent soldiers who register all sorts of gripes about getting shots and try to get out of them. How many soldiers would take their immunizations if it were voluntary?

At the Prison Hospital, we had been accumulating vaccines that the Red Cross sent in. When there were 300 doses of typhus vaccine available for our 2,400 men, notice was posted that at 1,000 hours on Sunday, shots would be given to those who wanted them. There would be no records, no rosters, no Form 81s. If you want the shot, come and get it. If you don't want it, stay away. There are only 300 shots available, first come, first served.

Sunday turned out to be a cold day—10 below zero. I wondered if the men would wait outside so long in such bitter cold just to get the needle. I soon found out.

Hundreds—yes, hundreds of men were waiting in line. There were so many that we decided to give half doses. Shots were given while they lasted—a total of 600—and many had to be refused. It was certainly a triumph for Preventive Medicine.

Early in February, the Germans crowded 3,000 of our men into trains and shipped them out. This included most of our sick and wounded. On February 6, the rest of the camp was marched out on a few hours' notice. I marched with Section C which now numbered 2,600 men. I was worried and wondered if the men knew what was in store for them. We were on the road for 86 days during which we marched, starved, froze, marched, scratched our lice, suffered disease and marched some more. We lived in filth, slept in barns or fields and dodged aerial strafings. We marched from the Eastern Front to the Western Front and then doubled back to the Eastern Front. We covered 600 miles.

For food we averaged 770 calories a day of German rations for the first 53 days of the march. (An American soldier gets 3,500 calories a day.) If it had not been for

the Red Cross food parcels we received occasionally many more of us would have died. Those parcels not only gave us an additional 600 calories a day but they were our only appreciable source of proteins. The last 30 days of the march, the Germans issued us more food and Red Cross parcels and were much more humane. They could hear Allied artillery in the distance and knew the day of judgment was nearing.

As a medical experience, the march was nightmarish. Our sanitation approached medieval standards. The inevitable result was disease, suffering and death. We soon found out what it means to live in filth on low rations and little water.

Our first problem was handling the stragglers. Volunteers at the end of the column would spot a fellow who was weakening and support him. When a straggler could not keep up even with help, a medic would stay behind to give him the protection of his Red Cross Arm Band. In that way the straggler was much less likely to be bullied by the guards. Sometimes it didn't work and both medics and stragglers were gun-buffed.

The number of stragglers increased daily and it became impossible to support them all. The Germans allowed us to organize a "slow party" which was made up of sick men who were permitted to proceed at their own pace. That helped some. In addition, they gave us a few farm wagons to carry the sick. Uncomfortable and cold as those wagons were, there was a long line of men waiting to get on them every morning. There was room for the sickest only.

In the course of the march, we would pass Allied prison camps which were too crowded to take us in but we were usually able to leave our most serious cases.

At first the stragglers consisted of men with blisters, aching feet or joints, and tired muscles. These men suffered, but they didn't cause us much concern for we expected them to toughen up. The medics made up a slogan: "Keep on marching and your blisters will turn into callouses and your aches into hard muscles." Most of them did, too.

But all too soon the straggling became more serious. Blisters became infected and many an ugly abscess developed and had to be opened. Mud and cold brought frost-bite and in some cases, gangrene and amputation. Men collapsed either from hunger, weakness, fear or pain.

The fifth day of the march, the first case of diphtheria was diagnosed. This soon was followed by a case of erysipelas. Then cases of pneumonia began showing up, and on the latter part of the trip, tuberculosis was in evidence. There were several attacks of acute appendicitis.

But the illness that really plagued us was dysentery—a natural sequence to living in filth and drinking unsafe water. Dysentery just overwhelmed us. It was of varying intensity. Some fellows were just annoyed while others were prostrated. Almost everyone had it. Day after dreary day as we marched along, the roads were lined with our dysenteric comrades relieving themselves. The sad spectacle of a soldier relieving himself right on a village street was so common that it excited no comment from German villagers.

Taking care of all the sick was a heartbreaking job. We started out by organizing a hospital and before long many a former airman was working on our staff. Every night the

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## OCCUPATION

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For those interested in learning the inner secrets of the beauty salon, a cosmetology course is offered at the Ecole Jandeau in Paris. Anyone with musical talent can get two-months' instruction at the world-famous Conservatoire National de Musique in Paris. Air force medical officers who want to tune up for their return to private practice are taking special medical courses at the University of London and the University of Liverpool. Arrangements have been made with British schools for teachers and educators to study the school system and the administrative organization.

The Building Research Station in Watford, England, is offering special courses in architecture, chemistry and engineering as applied to construction and construction materials.

London's Library Association has arranged a refresher course for librarians, while the British Pharmaceutical Society, also in London, has arranged a course that allows students to work in civilian hospitals and pharmacies. Shakespeare can be studied at Stratford-on-Avon. Dramatic activities are offered at London's Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Arts. Birmingham University has special classes in chemistry and engineering. All phases of architecture are available for study at the London School of Architecture. Some air force men are even working with the Ministry of Public Health and various local government units on projects of municipal architecture and housing, public health administration and city engineering.

Along with the sports and educational programs, plenty of GI and civilian entertainment is constantly on tap. Movies attract about 1,000,000 Army personnel every month. Permanent airfields now being established are equipped with full-size stages so that big shows like "Oklahoma," "Up in Central Park," and the Radio City Revue will not be handicapped. One AAF outfit has converted a German rifle range into a gigantic indoor theater with dressing rooms and all the trimmings. The emphasis is on large, well-prepared shows that offer real entertainment.

Live is another big entertainment factor and almost every base has its own orchestra. About 300 bands at various air force bases in the theater are augmented by 14 others which are on continuous tour. The 53 radio stations of the American Forces Network are featuring more and more soldier talent. Air force libraries are stocked with 284,000 books and best sellers are being continually added to the shelves. Librarians report a big increase in readership during the past few months.

But the more that special services provides, the more the men seem to want. Here is a typical list of items requested by an air force station, Germany: 15 radios, 200 basketballs, 150 pairs basketball shoes, 2 gross of ping-pong balls, orchestrations, V-discs, needles, 1 Hill Billy set, 2 bass violins, 1 public address system, 50 athletic supporters, 1 trombone, B-flat. The order was filled promptly. ☆

## DEATH MARCH MEDIC

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over the best part of the barn if their is such a thing as the best part of a barn. They cleaned it out, found straw and spread it out, and laid out the sick. That was our "hospital."

The basic principle of treatment was bed rest. While others stood for hours in cold and rain to get a drink of boiled water or a few potatoes, the sick rested in the straw and whatever rations were available were brought to them. Whenever possible they received extra portions.

For medicines the Germans gave us pitances of important drugs. We had some Red Cross medical parcels which gave us a small supply of bandage, tape, aspirin, lice powder and salves. For hot water-bottles, we heated bricks. For dysentery cases, we made our own charcoal and let the patients chew it and swallow the powder. I had a small supply of sulfa pills which never left my person. These precious pills were doled out only to the most serious cases and those with pneumonia.

Speaking of pneumonias, the technique of listening to a chest was unorthodox since I had no stethoscope. First I would kneel by the patient, expose his chest, scrape off the lice, and then place my ear directly on his chest and listen. After that I would usually remark to the men that if anyone present felt sorry for himself, first let him think of my sad case. After all, at one time I used to have lady patients with chest trouble. This was always good for a laugh and a laugh is good therapy.

In the absence of medications, the sick were dosed freely with pep talks. A sample pep-pill would go like this: "The human body is the toughest device ever built for it is 'fearfully and wonderfully made.' You fellows are young. You are far stronger than you realize. You can take an unbelievable amount of punishment and make a snappy comeback and be as good as ever. Hundreds of men in this column have already done it and you will do it too."

Time will disclose the number of amputations and of deaths. We left our worst sick behind at prison hospitals and never saw them again.

At first the medics did all the work at the barn "hospitals." That was pretty tough on the medics for they marched all day often working during rest periods, and on rest days they walked extra miles to cover sick call for the scattered units of our column. This was improved when airman Bob Merriam volunteered to do all the non-medical work around the hospital. He soon organized a group of helpers headed by Ray Stocker and Shorty Hunzinger. When shovels were available, they dug latrines. They prepared and distributed rations and boiled water. They operated a carrying service from "sick wagon" to "hospital" for those patients with infected feet who could not stand and for those who were too weak to walk. Since many of these fellows also had dysentery, they had to be carried to and from the latrine all night. On several occasions when the Germans could not or would not get us horses to

pull the "sick wagon," the non-medics alternated teams of 12 men each to haul the wagon by manpower.

Two other members of the "hospital" staff were the two Sergeants Wagner. Both of these gunners spoke perfect German so they were made the "hospital traders" and they were to secure extra food for the sick. Although we were starving, there was plenty of food in the rural areas we marched through. We had small supplies of coffee, soap, chocolate and cigarettes given to us by the Red Cross and these luxury items were wanted badly by the Germans. The guards were ordered however to shoot anyone trading with German civilians. The trick in black marketing was to trade through a friendly guard or induce him to allow you to contact civilians. The Wagner boys often came back with eggs and bread which they had bartered for coffee and soap. Some frauleins would give anything—and that means anything—for a chocolate bar. All we wanted however was eggs.

On several occasions we received some unexpected help from our flying comrades. The last weeks of the war, Allied planes were frequently attacking the Jerries. Sometimes the strafing attacks would kill horses near us. That was manna from Heaven! Willing gunners cut up those horses fast, and to our hungry columns, no meat ever tasted better than that strafed horse furnished through the courtesy of the "Flying Quartermaster Corps" (P47s, 51s and Hurricanes).

As Allied Forces drew closer, German treatment became better. On May 2, two British sergeants in a recon car reached our column. At this beautiful sight, the Germans began throwing down their arms. One of the sergeants addressed the Germans and us. "For you the war is over," he said. This time it was. ☆

### Answers to Quiz on Page 45

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|--|---|
| 1. (c) Society of Automotive Engineers   | 8. (b) Nimitz   |
| 2. (A) True  | 9. (d) Hiroshima  |
| 3. (d) A diagram showing wind strengths and directions in a given area   | 10. (c) A n e x - tremely heavily armed B-17                |
| 4. (c) Bombing through overcast  | 11. (A) True  |
| 5. (b) General Cannon  | 12. (b) False. It is a single-engine, pusher-type amphibian |
| 6. (A) Shegimitsu  | 13. (b) A P-51 outfit that operated in northern China       |
| 7. (b) Nine — United States, China, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand and the Netherlands | 14. (d) Nick  |
|  | 15. (b) 6th   |
|  | 16. (A) True  |
|  | 17. Six   |
|  | 18. (d) B-24  |
|  | 19. (A) General Giles                                       |
|  | 20. B-32  |