

**Excerpt of Letter to William A. Carleton
from John P. Hunter (351st ROG) dated
30 Jun 1996**

My name is John Hunter, Radio Operator with the crew of Robert Schomp (Robert J. Schomp) on B-17 #667. Our ship was named "Super Rabbit" assigned to hardstand 13. After flying 30 missions, including the "Frantic" mission to Russia, we were given a ten day leave, arriving back at the base on the 28th of July.



While away another crew used our plane, returning with a wheels up landing – scratch #662. At briefing the next day, July 29th, our crew was alerted to return to Merseberg. The mission on the 28th had met with poor results. The flak at Leuna was intense resulting in the loss of 8 B-17s, including ours. We had flown with a nine man crew with one waist gunner left behind, and in the event of a fighter attack the Radio Operator went to man the other waist gun. Out of the seventy-two airmen, twenty-nine were killed (murdered) and many more wounded.

Four of the Morris Clark crew were slain by the Germans, using clubs and rifle butts. I had the misfortune of being captured by two soldiers. A third soldier running toward me, shouted something in German, then took out his pistol and shot me in the groin area – the bullet ending up in my left buttock. The force of the bullet was like being hit with a baseball bat, doubling me up and driving me backward landing me on my back. He then ordered the other two to beat me with their rifle butts but I warded

off most of the blows with my arms and elbows.

While this was going on a group of French prisoners working on this farm nearby came on the scene jabbering in French and German. The beating abruptly stopped. They helped me to my feet – I was bleeding profusely from a few belts that got me on my left cheek and the back of the head. The two guards then took me to a small barn nearby, pushed me against the wall – taking all my heavy flying clothes, leaving me with a blood soaked summer uniform. I sat down on the floor in a pool of blood. The bullet had severed an artery. I quickly took my pants and shorts off, tearing off a small swatch of cloth and pushing it into the hole where the bullet entered, then used my belt as a tourniquet.



Ed. Note: Sgt. Hunter remained deaf in one ear from the blows he received when captured.

Excerpts from John Hunter's account of the final days of the Black march.

The march lasted 56 days. On most nights, we slept in barns and for food we tried to live on a small ration of potatoes, with a small piece of black bread. The last ten or twelve miles of marching were agonizing for me, as my physical condition had deteriorated so much that two of my friends helped me to the day's destination: a stalag for ground troops. My two friends, Tony Scime and Art Malaney managed to get me to sick bay where I was treated for exhaustion and severe dysentery. Tony was treated for pneumonia.

After several days, a British officer asked us to volunteer to drive Red Cross trucks delivering supplies to other camps in Northern Germany. He said it would be risky but we'd have better food and might not survive if we had to march again.

The transportation network in Germany was chaotic because of strafing attacks and bombing raids on anything that moved material or people. Getting to Lubeck, where the Red Cross depot was located, took 3 days. We traveled in all types of trains and vehicles, including a flat bed freight train on which we were strafed by a British Spitfire. We arrived safely in Lubeck and stayed for about 3 days. I'd guess we were about 110 lbs. at this time. After binging on Red Cross parcels supplemented by oatmeal, soup and bread, we gained weight rapidly.

We were assigned a large truck with a German guard, who guided us to a warehouse on the docks. A Swedish ship unloaded R.C. parcels and clothing to be carried by our truck to various prison camps and to the large groups of POW's still on the march.

We had to be vigilant at all times. In the areas where we expected aerial attacks, Tony would ride on the right fender, scanning the sky. On one such trip, we came upon a German convoy under attack, about a half mile ahead. I quickly turned off the road, driving the truck to a wooded area, Tony and I jumped off and hid behind some large trees. We stayed until we could no longer hear any aircraft. When I reached the convoy, many trucks were burning and I had to thread my way past them. After that, our return to Lubeck was uneventful.

Towards the end of April, fewer guards roamed our area, but more soldiers were setting up barricades nearby. Trolley cars were being derailed and placed sideways. Telephone poles and large tree trunks were implanted in the road. We could here cannon fire in the distance. On the morning of May 2nd, the remainder of the guards changed into civilian clothes, leaving behind their rifles and pistols. We all hit the floor when machine gun fire erupted and bullets ripped into our building. The shooting stopped and, crawling slowly to a window, I saw a jeep like vehicle with two soldiers; a driver and a machine gunner.

We opened the door and yelled to the Tommies that we were American POW's, and not to shoot! When they were sure who we were, they called us over and there was a joyous reunion. Other British foot soldiers came onto the scene and we were all shaking hands and embracing each other. They told us to stay close to our building and that tanks were coming.

We were finally free, but confused. It was such an emotional high, that we momentarily forgot that the war was still on. We were jolted back to reality when we heard tanks blasting through the streetcars, as they continued their onslaught through Lubeck. At one point, a lone German fighter flew low over our building.

At the rear of the building was a side road, where we saw a column of German soldiers coming towards us. They were a rag-tag bunch, with bandages wrapped around their heads, some with their arms in slings and some riding wagons, obviously badly wounded; they all wanted to surrender.

After VE day, we were loaded onto a Halifax bomber to be flown back to England. The pilot knew that we were American fliers, so he flew low enough for us to see the destruction we had rained on German cities.