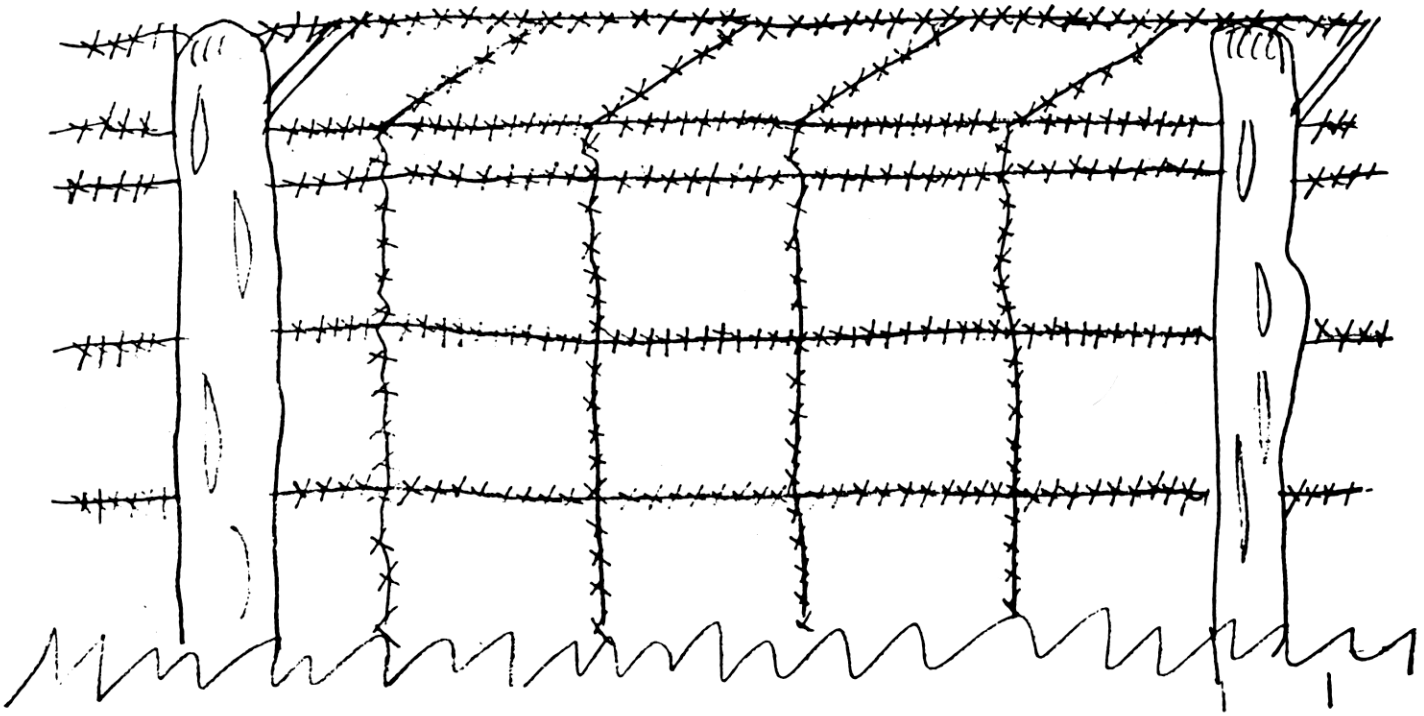
The Shoe Leather Express



THE EVACUATION OF KRIEGSGEFANGENEN LAGER

STALAG LUFT IV DEUTSCHLAND GERMANY

BY JOSEPH P. O'DONNELL

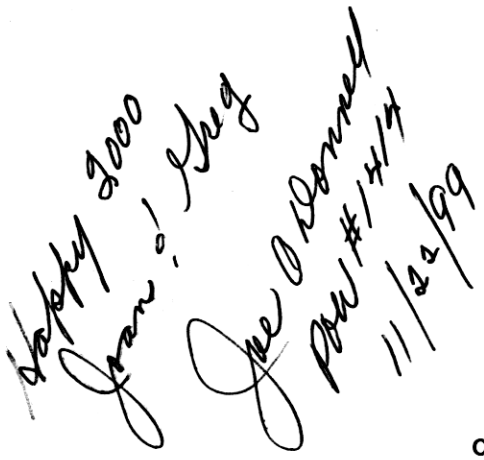
THE
SHOE LEATHER EXPRESS

FEBRUARY 6, 1945

TO

MAY 2, 1945

86 DAYS



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CORRECTION

The word "concubine" was
misused, it should be "combine".

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PREFACE

In early January, 1945, the Russians started their winter offensive from Warsaw, Poland. Stalag Luft IV was 200 miles northwest of Warsaw. The Russian breakout initiated the evacuation of Luft IV. By February 3, 1945, the front line was 40 miles south of Luft IV and extended to the Oder River, 40 miles east of Berlin; our only route left for evacuation was northwest through a narrow 50 mile gap to Swinemunde, on the Baltic Sea.

On January 15, 1945, the sick and crippled Prisoners of War were shipped by 40 and 8 boxcars to various P.O.W. camps elsewhere in Germany. The remaining "so-called" healthy P.O.W.'s departed at various intervals, not knowing our destination, direction or a definite time of arrival. The Germans told us they were evacuating us to a better camp, a three to four day march. This particular march, "The Shoe Leather Express," endured for 86 days and 600 miles of beatings, starvation, amputations, frostbite, frozen feet and hands, dirt, lice, filth, degradation, heat, thirst and death. Many of the Prisoners of War referred to the march as "The Death March" or, "The Black March".

The intent of this book is to document the evacuation of the American Prisoners of War from Stalag Luft IV, Grosstychow, Pomerania in early January and late February, 1945. The exact routes taken by each individual or groups that evacuated the camp are known to a very few ex-Prisoners of War. Little has been written or filmed about the hardships encountered on these forced marches or the hardships encountered on the 40 and 8 boxcar rides.

To dwell on camp life would be superfluous; we were there, all 9,000 of us. There are "Log Books" that were kept by Kriegies detailing camp existence but during the evacuation many of the "Log Books" went underground for fear of confiscation and for the lack of writing tools. These happenings, some humorous, and many more tragic, are now locked in each individual's mind, not knowing that we did not all take the same route to liberation.

Some liberties were taken and some assumptions were made in describing the evacuation route taken from Stalag Luft IV. Some inaccuracies are obvious to an ex-Prisoner of War who endured the hazardous journey through Germany. The information received from former ex-Prisoners of War was taken from their notations written on small pieces of paper; these notations of the towns and dates they marched through or marched by were later entered into their "Log Books" after a day's march and in the fading light in the barn.

Little concern should be taken as to whether Bittersfeld was noted at Bietterfield or Kragow was noted as Gragow. After 37 years these small errors are insignificant; the general directions are authentic rather than a pinpoint, town for town description of the marches. It appears that at the end of a day's march, the column was divided into various smaller groups; these smaller groups were then distributed to the available barns in the area. Some groups would continue marching for 4 or 5 kilometers to a barn or a field for the night lodging.

It is doubtful that a direct route was taken by all P.O.W.'s; there is reason to believe that the column was divided at any given time into small groups and marched a similar route, but would regroup at the end of the day and, in some instances, several days later. The final destinations and liberation sites are far more accurate than the detail of each individual route.

THE PREPARATION

Preparation, other than getting the kinks out, was necessary for the march. We needed to prepare for survival in the severe Baltic winter that was upon us. Many little details had to be taken care of and we had the personnel with skills, from all walks of life, to draw upon. The needle and thread became important tools. It was not an uncommon sight to see Kriegies with little sewing skills, stitching away; and there was always a helping hand for those unable to sew or perform the other necessary tasks.

Two important items of clothing were used for other than their original purpose, or modified for a dual purpose. One was the GI scarf. The scarf was doubled in half and stitched eight to ten inches down from the center fold. The scarf then acted as an extra piece of headwear, as ear muffs and a scarf. On top of this was worn the GI knit helmet liner. The second item was a GI shirt. The shirt was turned inside out and sewn across the entire bottom, just above the shirt tails, and again sewn up the bottom front to about three buttons from the top. The shirt sleeves were sewn to the bottom back of the shirt and then turned right side out. By placing each arm through the shirt sleeve openings, we had an effective knapsack. Unbottoning the three top buttons gave easy access to our meager personal belongings.

Several problems were encountered with our knapsacks, but were quickly resolved with a piece of cloth, or a rope, if you were lucky enough to find a piece. The knapsack kept sliding down our backs, which made walking more uncomfortable and difficult. One piece of cloth or rope was tied to each sleeve across the chest to keep the sleeves from sliding from our shoulders. The second piece of cloth or rope was tied in the center of the first piece and again tied to our belts. This kept the knapsack from sliding back and also kept our pants up. The final part of this preparation was to roll our two blankets, one GI and one German blanket, (the latter practically worthless) into a tight roll and form it into the shape of a horseshoe; and this roll was placed over the knapsack and secured. This operation usually required the assistance of another Kriegie.

Our personal belongings were few, but what we had were essential for our survival- a knife, fork and spoon (many of these were carved from one of the wooden slates from our bunks) soap, washcloth, towel, toothbrush (no toothpaste), some had combs, needle and thread, an extra pair of socks, handkerchief. Several hundred of the Kriegies had log books that were distributed at Christmas time by the Red Cross, one log book per room. The recipient of the log book was usually determined by pulling a name from a hat. The log book was usually on the bottom of the knapsack. Our letters from home were read one more time before securing them for what turned out to be a wet and freezing trip. Our personal possessions were accumulated from packages from home, Red Cross parcels, and some Kriegies received an American or Canadian Red Cross prisoner of War Kit. These possessions, in many cases, were shared with the less fortunate Kriegies that arrived at Stalag Luft IV with nothing more than the clothes on their backs (and then some of this clothing was confiscated--i.e. the inner liners of the electrical suits). These inner liners contained the wiring and insulation. The outer jacket and pants had little protection against the cold.

The advanced information received about our evacuation gave us the opportunity to conserve and hoard as much food as we could gather. Cigarettes and "D" bars (chocolate) were excellent for bartering. These two items were a form of currency. With one pack of cigarettes and one "D" bar, a smart hard bargaining Kriegie could acquire an extra pack of cigarettes and a "D" bar and still retain his original pack of cigarettes and "D" bar. Little did we know that a bar of soap outside of the camp was a prime bargaining unit, and we were well supplied with Ivory soap. It was something you couldn't eat and there was a plentiful supply; also a Red Cross Parcel seemed to contain a larger percentage of soap than edible items. Thus our knapsack contained but one bar of soap.

One more item was prepared for our eventual departure. We needed a utensil for drinking, one for cooking and one for eating. These utensils had to be light weight, easy to pack, and be able to withstand minimal cleaning, and most of all to have little value to anyone else except another Kriegie. The Klim can (milk spelled backwards) was the answer to our problem. But now, we had to meet another challenge, and that was to stow three cans, each approximately four inches in diameter and about three inches deep. A simple solution: you punch a small hole just below the rim, insert a piece of wire, cloth or string, and attach the three cans to your coat belt. I can assure you we were detected at least one mile in any direction. Imagine 2,000 Kriegies with three cans clanging with every step!

January 26, 1945

The first evacuees are moving out, and from my personal notes in my "Log Book" I have made these scribbled notes.

"Friday - cold, light snow, Siedel, Catone, Groff and Gingrich are moving - destination unknown. 1,500 are moving out altogether".

January 27, 1945 - February 4, 1945

We have been on the move - we have been packing and unpacking for several days - 450 fellows left the compound and 1,500 left the day after that. There were 505 of us left, I was undecided whether we would move out of "B" lager, or out of the camp, or to "C" lager. We moved to "C" lager. Russians, English, French, Poles and Czechs came in our place. The Red Cross cans were stacked behind the potato bins. The P.O.W.'s were looking through the cans picking out bits of food - one fellow threw some soap to the British in the next lager, a guard in one of the towers shot at him, the bullet glanced up, went through the wall about two feet over my bunk - it hit the ceiling and glanced off the wall and stuck in the door.

After numerous rumors and announcements of departure we finally left compound "B" or lager "B", and marched 100 yards to compound "C". In compound "C" we occupied the bunks of Kriegies that had evacuated the day before. After leaving compound "B", a sort of mass confusion existed. After spending more than eight months in one place, you had some sort of a sentimental feeling for your little niche. Everything you owned was either on your back or in the Knapsack. Everything seemed transient, no permanence. It was just a matter of time before we moved out.

Again from my personal "Log Book".

February 5, 1945

"An announcement was made today that we would not evacuate this camp".

10:00 A.M. another announcement that we would move out in the morning.

We knew our evacuation was imminent as the Russians were advancing from the east. We could look through the cracks in the shutters over the windows and see the flashes from the artillery; and if the wind was right, we could hear the artillery at the front. My estimation was that we were less than 30 miles from the front lines.

THE SHOE LEATHER EXPRESS

The "Shoe Leather Express" begins - 86 days - February 6, 1945. My last entry in the "Log Book" at Stalag IV, as written then.

All packed and ready to go - 1/3 loaf of bread was issued - we left at 9:30 A.M. A full Red Cross parcel was received at the VorLager. Some fellows had four parcels. We stopped for about a half hour outside the camp to arrange our packs. Soap, prunes, milk, etc. were thrown away because the fellows were under the impression that we wouldn't be on the road long. Also, we did not know the value of soap as a trading article.

After the first few kilometers of walking, I had three blisters, and aching shoulders. That evening after we stopped at two large barns; 2,500 men were placed in them to sleep. Price, Mays and I went in as concubines. We opened 1 parcel and ate crackers, corned beef, butter and jam. What we didn't eat, we set on a ledge of the barn)a hole was right behind it) and at 5 in the morning I saw a stick come up from outside and knock them off. We found the remains of corned beef, jam and butter untouched, but not edible. They landed in manure; the crackers were gone. Walked 18 kilos!

From the last entry in my "Log Book" February 6, 1945 - An explanation as to why Prisoners of War would deliberately throw food away.

Prisoners of War were issued the minimum of food that was required by the Geneva Convention. It was sub-standard, consisting daily of potatoes and bread, ersatz coffee or mentholated tea. It sounds sustantial, but the bread consisted mainly of sawdust, and, "or what"; the ersatz coffe was a combination of burnt grains. Potatoes are potatoes, whether in Germany or America; the big difference is the quantity and availability. The Red Cross parcels (supposedly one per man per week) were reduced to one for every four men and distributed whenever the Commandant felt like it. We were always anticipating our next portion of the Red Cross parcel. Many excuses were given for the delays, such as "your planes bomb the Red Cross trains". That was pretty much of a standard excuse.

When we left the camp and entered the VorLager, the Red Cross Warehouse was opened, and we could take as many Red Cross parcels as we wanted. Greed and hunger took precedence over logic. Each Red Cross parcel weighed about eleven pounds. This eleven pounds, we would have to carry. After several miles from the VorLager, we realized that we could not carry our greed, so we discarded what we thought then were the untradeables, or the items of less bargaining power. Prunes are not welcomed by the P.O.W. with chronic dysentery. Toilet paper certainly played an important part and was admirably accepted as an integral article for cleanliness and comfort for anyone that had contacted dysentery; but, here again, it was bulky, not a very good bargaining article and it was not edible. So, still believing that a three day march would only require one roll of toilet paper, we discarded the excess. We threw the excess rolls of toilet paper to some women working in the field, more as an insult, but the women considered these rolls as manna from heaven. The women raised their arms with their fortunate gift and shouted, "Shitzen Papier", "Shitzen Papier". We then realized our mistake.

Our first day was uneventful. It was just a matter of following the footsteps of the Kriegie in front of you and we were elated that we now had one day behind us and two more days of marching should not be that difficult. Our Red Cross Parcel should be sufficient to last us until we would again reach permanent shelter and resume the daily routine of the barbed wire enclosure and again receive our daily sustenance of black bread and potatoes. One of our first setbacks was the arrival of some lousy little bastards called "lice", which Webster describes as "any of the small, flat, wingless parasitic insects, with either biting or sucking mouth parts, that infest the hair or skin of men and other warm blooded animals". We, as prisoners of war, were selected by the lice as warm blooded animals, since we bedded down either with the farm animals or bedded down in close proximity to the recently departed horse or cow resident. It was not uncommon for the farmer to protest the evacuation of his stock in order to make available accommodations for a lousy bunch of dirty P.O.W.'s.

There were some sunny days, so we would gather to the leeward side of the barn and strip down to our waist for a lice removal detail. Our main concern was to remove the eggs. The eggs, about 1/64" long, were usually found in the seams of our shirts or underwear, and were neatly laid in a straight row of ten to fifteen in a cluster. There were two effective methods of removal. One was to pick the eggs out and crush them between the fingernails. Two, to burn them out with a match. The latter usually resulted in burning the seams and the stitching of our shirts and pants.

Although a barn offered shelter and some warmth from the bitter cold, it also triggered a nightly sojourn for our lousy little companions. They never seemed content to remain in one place to feed; they always sought greener pastures, which would start at our necks to our waist or vice versa, and we would continually pinch and squeeze to interrupt their travels. We always lost the battle and conceded, "That if you kill one, a thousand will come to its funeral." We were eventually liberated from both of our captors.

KRIEGIE INGENUITY

It has often been said that "necessity is the mother of invention". We, as P.O.W.'s, did little inventing, but we did change that expression to "necessity is the mother of survival". Our necessities were simple - food, clothing, shelter and health. There are vey few of us today that would stoop to pick up a safety pin, a penny, a piece of sting or a stick of wood or small twig. These insignificant articles would play an important role, not only for our survival, but, in a very small way, to make our miserable existence less uncomfortable.

Probably one of the most intriguing contraptions or inventions that I witnessed was the hand operated, portable, blower cookstove. Before going into details of the construction of the cookstove, an explanation is required as to the necessity for a portable blower cookstove. As evening approached, we knew the end to our day's march was near and it was time to start gathering bits of wood and twigs to build a fire when we reached the barnyard. The gathering of wood for fires was risky. We had to scurry off the road, retrieve a twig, and get back into line before a guard could load his rifle and shoot. Usually we bribed the guard with a few cigarettes before attempting this maneuver. Eventually it became routine and the guards ignored our scurrying.

At the barnyard, each concubine would build a fire, boil some water for coffee, and cook whatever food we had. It took a large amount of wood to build a fire hot enough to boil water, or suffice it to say, to boil potatoes, even though the potato was sliced razor thin. So the necessity, to make survival less uncomfortable, was the cookstove.

There were very few of these cookstoves, but what we had was shared for a price with other Kriegies. A board confiscated from a barn was painstakingly whittled into an 8" to 10' diameter wheel. A hole about a half inch in diameter was whittled through the outer face and a suitable peg was driven in to act as a handle. A base was constructed for a board of suitable length and width and another board was mounted vertically to support the wheel. The wheel had a "v" groove around the outside diameter for the drive belt (a piece of string). A smaller wheel, about two inches in diameter with a "v" groove and a half inch diameter hole in the center with a peg driven in and slotted on the other end to accept four tin blades made from a Klim can that acted as the blower. The blower was placed in a Klim Can with an opening in the side and another Klim Can sitting on top. Between the two Klim Cans and at the bottom of the top can, numerous pieces of wire were pushed through to act as a grate.

The necessity of the cookstove was to force an intense heat, using very little wood. All preparations were made for boiling water, and sliced and diced potatoes were made before the fire was started. The fire was started and a Kriegie turned the handle and a furnace-like fire was underway. A Klim Can of water was placed on top and within minutes a boiling can of water was ready for use.

Since potatoes required a longer period of time, the wheel turning was slowed down, and, as required, additional fuel would be added to the fire. After the concubines satisfied their

needs, they would snuff out the fire and save the unburned wood for another meal.

Necessity again created the "concubines". We did not participate in the true definition of a concubine or concubinage, which is the "cohabitation of a woman who lives with a man although not legally married". We participated only as cohabitants, which, more respectively defined, was "a person who lives together with another or others". Any suspicions of living with a woman and not being legally married were unfounded. It was rare that we saw a woman and then it was at an untouchable distance. Our concubines were for survivial; and we cannot deny that a barn jammed to overflowing with some 500 or more Kriegies was cohabitation.

A concubine usually consisted of three Kriegies, sometimes two, sometimes four, but the most logical number combination was three. Further explanation will confirm the logic of three men versus two or four men. Of all the reasons for a three man concubine, there is no one reason to justify this combination, there are many reasons. As stated before, we each had two blankets, and with a combination of three Kriegies this gave us six blankets. After our arrival at a barn we would stake a claim to an area in the barn according to our arrival. First-in claimed the advantageous areas, usually located near an ext. Smoking in the barn was prohibited; there was always the constant fear of fire, accidental or intentional, by our captors.

Since we shared our food, it was imperative that we should stick together; but we usually marched in columns of fours and it always presented a problem at the end of a march, when the guards would count off 150 or 200 Kriegies for one barn. This would usually split a concubine. One hell of a lot of shuffling went on to get the concubine together again. When we staked our claim at an area in the barn, we usually sent one member of our concubine on a trading, bartering or stealing detail; the other two would construct our bed of straw for the night. Our bed of straw was covered with the three German blankets, two lengthwise and one across the bottom and tucked in. The three GI blankets would cover us along with our GI overcoats. We were never permitted to use any portion of the barn except the floor, although there were lofts available. Apparently this is where the hay was kept so it would not be contaminated by a bunch of filthy P.O.W.'s.

SWINEMÜNDE

On February 13, 1945 we arrived at the small town of Dobberphul. We were now eight days out of Grosstychow, Stalag Luft IV, and it was obvious that no end of our marching was in sight and our destination was still unknown. Stalag Luft IV was 143 miles behind us. We settled in to the daily routine of walking, sleeping, freezing and starving, awakened at 5:00 A.M., roll call, and a breakfast of two to three boiled potatoes, depending on size, then columns of threes or fours and follow the leader to our next destination.

February 14, 1945 was a grey, dismal day with a constant freezing rain and the relentless cold - that everlasting, freezing cold. We marched for two hours and then we were given a five minute rest period. Our original rest period was to be ten minutes every hour, but this was only for the first day out of camp. We were supposed to complete our toilet and rest in that short period of time. It usually took the entire five minutes just to urinate. This necessity was hampered by the intense cold, frozen fingers, and the fact that the Army Air Corp. still deployed the button down fly. The usual method to unbotton the fly was with the assistance of another Kriegie. He would perform the unbottoning procedure for you and you would return his favor. The actual process of urinating was just as difficult. Due to the freezing cold, any extension was just a dream.

The usual procedure at dusk was the separation of the column into small groups and then distribution to whatever barns that were available. But on this particular day, there was no separation of columns and distribution to the available barns. Darkness had settled in and we were still marching. Our only food was the potatoes at 5:00 A.M. or whatever was left from the original Red Cross parcel that was issued eight days ago. After sixteen hours of marching we arrived at our resting place, Swinemünde.

The conditions at Swinemünde were best described by Dr. Leslie Caplan in his testimony to The War Crimes Office, Civil Affairs Division 31 December 1947. I quote, "On 14, February 1945, Section "C" of Stalag Luft #4 had marched approximately 35 kilometers (21.74 miles). There were many stragglers and sick men who could barely keep up. That night the entire column slept in a cleared area in the woods near Swinemünde. It had rained a good bit of the day and the ground was soggy; but it froze before morning. We had no shelter whatever and were not allowed to forage for firewood. The ground we slept on was littered by the feces of dysenteric prisoners who had stayed there previously. There were many barns in the vicinity, but no effort was made to accommodate us there. There were hundreds of sick men in the column that night. I slept with one that was suffering from Pneumonia." Unquote.

The cleared area in the woods had consisted of pine trees. The trunks were removed but the limbs and branches were left behind in scattered piles. We took advantage of this meager shelter by gathering the branches and placing them in layers to form some protection from the feces and soggy ground. We then pulled as many branches as we could over us. These branches did little for us as a protective measure against the elements, but it had a tremendous affect upon us for common decency.

Swinemünde is located on the Baltic Sea approximately at 14° longitude, 54° latitude, north of Stettin between the Pommersche Bucht to the north and the Stettiner Haff to the south, which is the mouth of the Oder River. Swinemünde is on the island of Usedom and the town had valuable fisheries.

DAY 35 - A REFLECTION

March 12, 1945 - I sat in silent solitude and stared at my reflection in a dirty, ice-encrusted pool of water, filled by the melting snow. From my roadside resting place, I saw my face for the first time in 35 days. I saw a harried, starved, unshaven and unbathed skeleton, that once walked with pride and dignity as my companions. I now walked with animals, like myself, as companions. I now urinate and defecate in the woods, like an animal, with nothing more to wipe with but a leaf, some straw or my hand. I now urinate in the streets of small towns like a dog.

I questioned the reason as to why I was here. I stared into the icy pool and I asked, "Why am I here?" "Why me?" I saw in my icy pool the result of a human that was subjected to the rigors of war who had to submit forcibly to the indignities that only man can force upon another man. My icy pool cast a visual reflection of my countenance; least to say, my icy pool did not reflect my mental attitude. I finally realized that the thin, pale, wild-eyed creatures that were passing by me with death-like expressions were my real reflections, I had 2,000 mirrors; I had 2,000 reflections. I no longer needed my icy pool to reflect my degradation.

Day 35 was my day of reckoning; day 35 was my day of mental depression and; I was unaware that this mental depression and anguish would continue for another 51 days. The haggard and harried test of survival and endurance was my final resolution, that after 86 days of marching, I was not only liberated and regained my freedom, but I had won my battle. I defeated my adversaries: pestilence, greed, starvation, degradation, fatigue. I won my battle; I survived the sub-zero temperatures of the bitter Baltic winter of 1945.

Since I canot describe the feelings of the other P.O.W.'s on the 86 day "Death March", I took the liberty to write in the first person. The "I" should be substitued by "We". After 37 years, we, as Prisoners of War, won our battle, but now we are losing the war.

NOTE: NAZI"S PRISONERS REPORTED SUFFERING
NEW YORK, FEB.21, 1945

Richard F. Allen, Vice-Chairman of the American National Red Cross, says that American Prisoner's of War in Germany are being marched deeper into the Reich through temperatures as low as 30 degrees below zero without proper clothing.

Allen, in charge of insular and foreign operations for the Red Cross, told members of the organization's Brooklyn branch yesterday that "those of you who have someone in German prison camps must be ready for bad news".

"I am sorry to tell you that with the structure of Germany breaking up, there is real cause for concern for our Prisoner's of War:"

NOTE: FINAL ENTRIES 1945
THE DIARIES OF JOSEF GOEBBELS
EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY PROFESSOR HUGH TREVOR-ROPER

4 March, 1945

The Fuhrer is violently opposed to any steps being taken to assist Anglo-American Prisoner's of War now in process of transfer from the East to the neighborhood of Berlin.

There are some 78,000 of them and they can no longer be properly fed; they are riddled with lice and many of them are suffering from dysentery. Under present circumstances, there is little one can do for them. Perhaps it would be possible to call in the Red Cross to help in producing a semi-human existence for them.

Submitted by Russell "Rusty" Harvey, Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

REMOVE YOUR SHOES

Our chronic dysentery dictated a necessity for the enactment of several rules and regulations regarding our close cohabitation, and the small area that we would be confined to upon our arrival at the barnyard hotel for that evening.

The daylight hours usually presented very few problems. A slit trench was dug, either by an advanced detail, or, in many instances, we used the slit trench abandoned by a prior group of Kriegies. One problem was the erection of a sitting rail above the slit trench. This rail, supported between two crotched tree limbs, was primarily used for the sick, who were unable to squat. The rail was slanted to accommodate the shorter and taller Kriegies.

On many an occasion the rail was full to capacity, and a line was formed, waiting for the next available opening. Luck would have it that a short Kriegie would get the high part of the rail, which meant his feet would not touch the ground. He usually would have more on the heels of his shoes than he did in the trench. And it never failed that the taller Kriegie would find his opening at the lower end of the rail. His position at least prevented him from falling into the trench.

On one occasion the previous occupants of the barnyard toilet covered the trench with straw instead of refilling the trench with the dirt that was removed. One of our hapless Kriegies stepped into the trench, hip deep. It was very difficult to befriend someone in that condition, but we did lend a helping hand at a distance, a very long distance.

It was mandatory that he strip nude, - shoes, socks, every stitch of clothing. We provided him with straw to stand on, and one of his blankets to cover his shoulders. The temperature was below zero, but the water from the hand pump was at least above freezing. We rinsed his clothes in the water trough with long poles, both to break the ice covered water and to swirl his clothing.

Buckets of cold water were provided for his bath and many of the Kriegies contributed clothing until his own clothing was dry. We provided him with hot coffee and his concubine dismissed him for the usual daily details. He recovered from his ordeal and was back on the road marching again. He probably, to this day, will give a clear berth to straw.

Rule Number 1. When we left our barnyard toilet it would be covered with dirt and conspicuously marked. Rule Number 2 was enacted to prevent a similar situation.

Out barnyard hotel accommodations were lacking any and all of the necessities that are commonly accepted throughout the world as always just being there. The simplest of these necessities is light. In a country that is under constant bombardment by the British at night any light is a welcomed beacon. To light a match in the barn welcomed a direct punch in the mouth. Since we lacked lighting facilities, and it was necessary to remove ourselves to the outside, it then became necessary to set up a signaling system to get a Kriegie out of the barn and back in again without crushing someone's face with a foot encased in a GI shoe.

Rule Number 2. Remove your shoes before you go outside. After you reach the door put your shoes on. When you return, remove your shoes, and you must crawl on all fours both ways with the shoelaces tied together and then looped around your neck. We arranged our sleeping in squares or rectangles to permit a less hazardous exit and return. A constant whispering chatter was our dead reckoning system for the return of the concubine and it usually sounded like this "Hey Red, Here Joe, Hey Red, Here Joe," etc. until, after much abuse from the Kriegies you passed on the way, you finally returned to the concubine.

Included in Rule Number 2 was the procedure that must be followed after your exit from the barn. First it was imperative that you attract the guards attention and request permission to "Shitzen". The request was "Posten, Posten, Shitzen". After permission was granted by the Posten, you would proceed to the right or left, depending on whether the exit was in the middle of the barn or to the right or left, keeping the side of the barn at arms reach. At some point you would turn your rear to the barn, back up one step and squat.

The purpose for rule number 2 was to prevent a Kriegie from stepping in anothers defecation and returning to the barn leaving a trail of stink throughout the barn. Consider 500 Kriegies in one barn and all 500 Kriegies with chronic dysentery. Phew!

After three days of marching, the acquisition of blisters on the feet was not uncommon. It appeared to be a necessity and just another cause for discomfort. I recall fourteen blisters evenly distributed on both feet, seven on the right foot and seven on the left foot, and these fourteen blisters remained with me until Liberation Day plus.

Sometimes we tried to seek comforts beyond our expectations. One evening after a prolonged march in a driving rain we bedded down in a barn and proceeded to dry our clothing. Needless to say, we endeavored to accomplish an impossible task. But I, driven by some desire to at least have a pair of dry socks, and since I had a bed by the door, managed to contact a teenage girl from the house and bribed her into drying out my socks. After a long period of time she appeared at the door and presented me with a warm pair of socks. One problem--I was denied the comfort of a pair of dried socks, plus I was denied a pair of socks. Somehow she managed to burn the toes out of each sock. But they did feel nice and warm when I first put them on.

THE NOT SO GREAT ESCAPE

The bitter cold and freezing rain was behind us. We were now marching with our G.I. overcoats over our shoulders. A different form of hardship was upon us--thirst. At least with the snow we could quench our thirst while marching but without the snow we would have to endure a waterless march. Water was available at the barn in the morning but without closed containers for carrying water we could not drink until we arrived that evening at another barn. Several times we passed small streams and some of the P.O.W.'s broke out of the column and drank water from the stream. Captain Leslie Caplan the "C" column doctor reprimaded those P.O.W.'s to the extent that they probably can still hear his tirade today, although he is deceased. I was nearby when Captain Caplan physically dragged one P.O.W. from the stream back to the column. He told that P.O.W. and the rest of the column that he had been pleading with th commandant for medical supplies for the sick, and had been refused, and now if the commandant had learned that P.O.W.'s were drinking water there would be no chance at all to convince the commandant of the necessity for medical supplies. So now it was back to eating charcoal to help relieve the agonies of dysentery.

Apparently the Germans had a good weather forecast because after this day's march we would rest the next day. We arrived at the barn late in the evening and the one chance in a thousand happened. When we reached the outskirts of this small farming community we, as usual, were counted and separated and sent to the several farms in that area. I was separated from my concubine which meant that I was one of the last to arrive at the barn. By this time the barn was overcrowded and, along with the darkness, I was unable to find a place to sleep. I presented my problem to the guard and offered a solution by suggesting that he allow me to sleep under a loading platform. Since this was his post for the night he agreed, probably more for companionship than generosity or compassion. The loading platform was constructed of 2x6 boards with a one inch space between each board. The hard ground, although uncomfortable, was, at the time, a place to sleep.

About midnight a torrential rain forced the guard to seek shelter beneath the loading platform. He was prepared to withstand the rain with his army issue of foul weather gear. I motioned to the guard to allow me to enter the barn, he agreed and he escorted me back to the barn and let me in. James Hunter Cox and Wilbur C. Green were bedded down next to the door and made enough room for another body--mine.

The rain continued throughout the night, but had slackened to a drizzle by morning. It was a very fine mist but this was enough to cancel our march for that day. By mid-day the sun was out and the remainder of the day was clear, bright and warm. Again we stripped down to the bare necessity and burned the lice eggs. The warm weather and idle time led to discussions of escape. This was mid-April and we had no idea of the proximity of the front lines and whether liberation was near or a year away. The farm consisted of three barns; the larger barn was about twice the size of the other two and was used as a storage barn for hay. The farthest barn from ours had a fifteen foot ladder leaning against the side. Either Cox or Green scouted that barn and determined that a possible chance for escape could be attempted if we could get the ladder inside the barn. Once inside the barn we could get to the hayloft and remain there until the column moved out the next morning. We would then climb down the ladder and head for freedom.

Our hiding place was hot, but at least comfortable. We had about twenty feet of hay beneath us. We were at the apex of the roof halfway above the door that the hay was hoisted in. The two hours gave us ample time to contemplate our next move. After not too much thought I decided the escape attempt lacked planning and direction. First we had no idea where we were, second we had very little food; third we knew we had safety in numbers and fourth it was just a damn lousy idea. My decision was to return to the column and Cox agreed but Green intended to stick it out. It probably was his idea in the first place. Cox and I returned to the column. Our column moved out early the next morning, Cox and I glanced at the upper door of the barn and Greenie gave us a sign that he was OK and was determined to give his escape attempt a try.

To digress a bit: before we evacuated Luft IV we prepared for a three day march. Those preparations were described early under preparations. What I overlooked was the individual effort made by Greenie to eliminate any discomfort and hazards that would impede his walking. Our issue of G.I. clothing by the International Red Cross was on a first come first serve basis. Many P.O.W.'s, including myself, were issued shoes a size or so smaller, others received shoes a size or so larger, and the probability of exchange was 9,000 to 1. The same held true for all other articles of clothing. Greenie was issued a pair of G.I. pants two inches below the soles of his shoes, but while in camp he stitched the pant legs to a presentable length. The wide cuff was annoying but still enabled him to walk without difficulty. When we received the evacuation notice Greenie decided to shorten his trouser to a more comfortable walking length. He measured and measured and still cut the pant legs off two inches above his shoe tops. His major problem now was to keep the snow out of his shoes. This was accomplished by always walking in another P.O.W.'s footprints and by wrapping the cutoff pant leg with rags around his ankles.

Back to the "NOT SO GREAT ESCAPE". Cox and I arrived at the next barn and decided that we would form a two man concubine and we would then proceed to bed down for the evening. After we finished the necessary sleeping preparations we went about our bartering and foraging chores for food and firewood. Our area for bartering with the locals was limited in size and length and the overcrowding by the P.O.W.'s that had anything to bargain with, so Cox and I decided to give up the wood detail, since we had nothing to cook anyway and the two of us would bargain for food. We managed to obtain the front row section of the bargaining group and commenced with our spiels for food, but with little success. Our dismal failure to successfully obtain food was suddenly dismissed by the arrival of Greenie, escorted by two guards, flaunting an air of self-assurance as though he was the captor instead of the captive. A spontaneous burst of laughter by all, both guards and P.O.W.'s, seemed to suggest for that one fleeting moment that we were all back to a normal life. Greenie's pant legs had unraveled and were now two inches below his knees with strands of olive drab thread trailing down to his ankles. Any picture would have depicted him as the original PECKS BAD BOY.

THE RABBIT

The constant necessity to supplement our meager Red Cross Parcel supplies forced us to commit some acts that were dangerous and detrimental to our health and well being. As stated before, the role of the concubine was the detail of seek and search for food, either by trading with the locals, or by confiscation (stealing). The latter was the predominate measure.

The farmer was raising some prize rabbits, and not realizing the starved condition of his unwanted P.O.W. guests, left the rabbit hutch unguarded. Knowing several daring and risky moves would have to be accomplished to gain access to the hutch by the P.O.W.'s, several obstacles had to be overcome before the P.O.W could assure himself of a pot of rabbit stew. One obstacle was the ever present guards; the second was the distance the rabbit hutch was located from the barn.

On rare occasions, we would spend more than one night at a barn, and this was one of those rare occasions. The P.O.W.'s thinking was that by dawn they would be well on their way to the next barn before the farmer noticed anything unusual about the number of rabbits he once had. To accomplish the risky task of transferring a rabbit from a hutch to a stew pot required the participation of several Kriegies under the veil of darkness. Several Kriegies asked permission to go to the toilet, but when outside they split in two different directions. This confused the guard, and by the time the guard had regained control of his post, another Kriegie had one rabbit with a broken neck safely stashed away beneath a pile of straw.

The next morning our inner alarm clocks and the guards failed to awaken us. The Germans knew that the rest of the day would be overcast with periods of heavy rain. Knowing what the weather conditions would be, they let us sleep in and delayed roll call until several hours after daybreak. We were then informed that we would not march that day. The Kriegies knew they had to dispose of the rabbit and the best way was to follow the original plan for rabbit stew. But instead of stew for supper, it was stew for brunch. The fire was ready, the pot was ready with all the ingredients - rabbit, potatoes, onions, and several greens of unknown origin. In about one hour, a lot of empty bellies would be bursting with satisfaction.

Before the hour was up and the evidence could be consumed, the farmer had counted his rabbits. Finding one missing, he put two and two together and called the guards and Captain Leslie Caplan to conduct a search, starting with the pots over the fires. Captain Caplan asked the guards for permission to persuade the guilty Kriegies to come forward. Permission was granted, but no one came forward. In the initial confusion, the stew pot was removed from the fire to cool. That way, the odor of cooked onions would be minimized, and it also allowed the stew pot to be passed from one group to the next. The stew pot was eventually detected and the Kriegies were requested to remove the lid. The guards knew they were getting closer to solving the mystery of the missing rabbit; but, much to their surprise, when the lid was removed, all they saw was two undershirts and four pair of socks soaking in warm water.

I never knew whether the undershirts and socks were clean, but it was one of the best damned tasting rabbit stews. The chef was complimented for that something extra that no one could detect.

On one other occasion I was personally involved with the stew pot, but this involved a Hedgehog. A Hedgehog is similar to a porcupine and is native to Germany. The Hedgehog stew was bland tasting, probably needed salt. I wonder now, how many German farmers realized what happened to their canine and feline pets after the Kriegies left their farms?

That afternoon was clear, and at times the sun broke through the clouds and gave us a chance to warm ourselves and this was an opportune time to remove our shirts and try to kill some of those dirty little bastardly lice. It was impossible to rid ourselves entirely of these little bastards but it gave us some satisfaction of knowing there would be a few thousand less.

Our guards had asked for three volunteers to go on a wood gathering detail. I and two other P.O.W.'s volunteered, after learning our reward would be a hot meal prepared by the farmer's wife and served in the kitchen using real knives, forks and dishes. We left the barnyard in a horsedrawn wagon with one guard and the farmer. We headed out ot town, traveled about two miles to a patch of woods, we passed another wagon headed back towards town loaded with bundles of branches and three P.O.W.'s riding on top of the branches. The branches had to be tied in bundles and it was quite an effort for us to lift the bundles on to the wagon, but working as a team we managed to load the wagon and headed back to the farm with visions of a hot meal and a full stomach. Our meal was delayed for about an hour and a half. We were informed that our work detail was not only to gather wood but to saw and stack as much wood as possible in one hour. The one hour limitation was due to the German electric rationing. From four to five everyday the electric was turned on, and also for one hour in the morning. I believe we gave the farmer a good hour's work, and he seemed appreciative of our efforts. We made every effort to maintain our presence as near to the farmhouse as the guards would allow. Finally just before dark, around 6 o'clock, we were summoned to the back part of the farmhouse. We followed the guard through a cow barn where we were allowed to wash our face and hands at the water hand pump that was used for watering the cows. We entered the kitchen from the cow barn. The kitchen was immaculate, our footsteps were immediately removed from the kitchen floor with mop and pail by the farmer's wife.

No one talked, not the guard, the farmer, his wife, or us. We did not talk to one another for fear that a time limit was placed on us and we would be unable to finish our meal. The food was delicious (under any circumstances) and there was plenty of it, but to this day I cannot recall what the meal consisted of. Many days would pass before we would again have that satisfying feeling of a full stomach.

A CRIPPLED B-17

Each day presented a new challenge and a new and different experience. Our inner sense told us that liberation was now just a matter of time. Certain signs, especially the relaxed attitudes of the guards, gave us the impression that a defeated Germany was inevitable. But this was still a reality and we were still coping with the same conditions for survival; nothing much had changed except the weather. We could now maintain some sort of cleaniness by washing without soap and without the freezing cold. One tragic but a significant sign that the war was terminating was a lone crippled B-17 and one German fighter plane. Also our daily marches were shorter which meant our stay at the farms were longer and more time for rest for the sick.

The clear blue sky enabled us to witness the downing of a crippled B-17 by a lone German fighter plane. The crippled B-17 was alone, flying at a low altitude and headed back toward England. The target must have been some distance away because we never heard the bombing or flak. The fighter plane made several passes at the B-17. We could hear the machine gun fire from the fighter and the return machine gun fire from the B-17. Two airmen bailed out of the B-17, both parachutes opened. The B-17 continued on course and out of sight with no signs of fire. We do not know whether the B-17 made it or not. The reality and anguish of war had more of an affect on the German people than the P.O.W.'s. As we were watching the sad fate of the B-17 a German woman standing outside the kitchen door of the farmhouse was brandishing a large butcher knife. Her motions led us to believe that she would either behead or castrate us. The guards prevented either from happening.

A large trigger happy P-51 pilot disrupted the tranquility of a normal P.O.W. day. He straffed us. Apparently he took us for German soldiers and decided to hasten the end of the war. Fortunately his first straffing attempt was premature and the damage was limited to a row of Kolarabis. The German guards fired a few departing rifle shots but did not deter the P-51 pilot from attempting a second pass. Meanwhile the Germans set up a ground machine gun in anticipation of the second pass. I know a second pass was made, I heard the P-51 firing. I also heard the return fire from the German machine gun. No damage was visible on either side. My reaction, after the first volley from the P-51, was to dive for cover. The P-51 was traveling east to west, so I positioned myself face down on the west side of a two foot thick,

three foot wide stone pillar inside of the barn. I would have sustained less injuries if I remained next to the machine gun rather than the so called safety of the pillar. I had at least three layers of P.O.W.'s on top of me. Fortunately, they were all underweight, otherwise I would have been crushed by the mass of their bodies.

DOWN ON THE FARM

Sometimes the unusual happens, either by chance or by design, and on this particular day our march was terminated at one of the largest and richest looking farms on our entire march. The fields were plowed and signs of the spring crop of wheat or barley tinted the fields with a blanket of green. These tranquil surroundings would be for one fleeting moment and lead us to believe that a war never existed and we were there as tourists. A shout from the guard "Rouse Gain" or "Feddic Marchin" brought us back to the real world. A march of about one quarter of a mile from the main road brought us to the usual surroundings of two large barns constructed of half large stone at the base with the top half constructed of boards. The third barn was smaller and constructed entirely of wood. This barn was our motel for the evening.

After our usual chores of locating an area for sleeping and gathering our share of straw for our bed we set out foraging for food. When it comes to finding food, I believe a P.O.W. has a distinct sense of smell. The olfactory organ must strenghten when the stomach is empty, somewhat, as I have often heard, as when one loses hearing in one ear or sight of one eye and the other ear or eye acquires some of the strength from the damaged ear or eye. In this case, it was the nose. Within a short period of time several P.O.W.'s were cooking potatoes, but the usual potato mounds were either non-existent or were out of sight or the potatoes were removed from the mounds or placed in a potato cellar. Since it was spring time in Germany, the latter was the most probable reason, and that's where the P.O.W.'s found the potatoes in the potato cellar beneath the barn.

Some farm boy P.O.W. must have been raised in the potato farm belt of America in order to know the storage method for keeping potatoes and where the potato cellars were located. An exercise in gymnastics and cooperation from two other P.O.W.'s was required to get to the potatoes. First there was an eight foot high boarded partition to scale. On the other side of this partition was an area where the farm equipment was kept. There was another partition at a right angle to the solid boarded partition. The second partition was boarded but with a three inch space between each board. This served as a ladder. On the other side of this partition was an unoccupied area, and there was a two by four foot trap door that led to the potato cellar. After all of this there was a four foot drop to gain access to the potatoes.

The first partition was scaled by one P.O.W. cupping his hands and hoisting the other two P.O.W.'s, one at a time so they could grasp the top and pull themselves up and drop to the other side. The second ladder like partition presented no problem, but, to gain access to the potatoes through the trap door, one P.O.W. had to assist the other P.O.W. down to the potatoes. The P.O.W. in the potato cellar would fill a shirt knapsack with as many potatoes as he was able to carry. He then handed the sack to the other P.O.W. He in return would assist the other P.O.W. back out of the potato cellar. The two went back over the ladder-like partition to the area where the farm equipment was kept, then one P.O.W. would cup his hands and hoist the other P.O.W. with the potatoes to the top of the partition (this was the hard part), and he would then lower the potato sack to the third P.O.W. The P.O.W. on top of the partition would reach down and assist the other P.O.W. to the top of the wall, and then both dropped down to the barn floor. All of this was accomplished in semi-darkness. After three or four sorties by other P.O.W. groups, a system was set up with eight to ten P.O.W.'s participating, somewhat like a bucket brigade but more like a line of Army ants. It all stopped when the level of the potatoes dropped, which then made it impossible to get back out of the cellar.

For some unknown reason, our usual predawn departure was delayed. This delay enabled us to witness our first look at a wood fired automobile. A small automobile just slightly larger than today's Volkswagon, pulled up to a woodpile. The rear trunk lid was removed to allow a wood burning stove to be placed in the trunk. A huge woman struggled to get out of the car. She was six feet tall, with large hands and busts to match. She wore high black boots covered with fresh mud, indicating that she had been inspecting the crops. Our presence did not interest her in the least. She was probably accumstomed to the P.O.W's. She went to the woodpile, gathered an armload of wood, opened the stove door, threw in the wood, and got back in the car, with as much difficulty as she had getting out. She shifted gears and putt-putted down the road. We were later informed that this woman was a Baroness and owner of the farm. This would account for the well manicured and rich looking farm. We moved out.

A TRAIN RIDE TO FALLINGBOSTEL

Our fifty-first day out from Stalag Luft IV was not much different from our twenty-first or thirty-first day, except that we had the bitter Baltic winter behind us. A report that some of our fellow Kriegies had both legs amputated because of gangrene, related to frostbite, was a bitter blow to our morale. About the only condition that changed for the better was the weather. Our health was obviously becoming our major concern. We challenged each day for survival and the infrequent beatings by the guards lessened our chances for survival. Dysentery had weakened our bodies and spirit; the lack of food was the one thing that slowed down the results of dysentery. It is a harsh relief from the agonies of dysentery. The relief was worse than the infection.

We arrived at Ebstorf, a small town west of the Elbe River, at 53° latitude, 10°-30° longitude north, on March 28, 1945. We were loaded on boxcars at 3:00 P.M.; 65 P.O.W.'s to a boxcar that was designed to accomodate 40 men or 8 horses. These boxcars were affectionately known as the 40 and 8. We were jammed into the boxcars and the doors were sealed shut. The overcrowded condition would not permit all 65 P.O.W.'s to even sit down at one time. The sick were allowed to lie down. This meant that many of us had to remain standing for long periods of time; we alternated between standing and sitting. Even with these hardships, we felt we were far better off than previously. We had anticipated riding to our next destinations, not walking. We finally realized that we were now in a more dangerous situation; we were trapped inside of the boxcars that had not moved for more than ten hours, except for an occasional movement of 100 to 200 yards back and forth. We were vulnerable to strafing and bombings from our own aircraft, as the boxcars had no markings on them. The aerial activity in this area was considerable, and any freight movement was a prime target of the allies. I considered our confinement in the boxcars and the intermittent movement of the boxcars as a diabolic and intentional plan by the German commandant to have us destroyed by our own Air Force.

The conditions inside the boxcars became unbearable and were aggravated by the filth and stench resulting from the P.O.W.'s who had to urinate and defecate on the boxcar floor. Fortunately, the boxcar I was in had a broken floor board. After several hours we were able to establish an opening sufficient to accommodate the dysentery aspect, but the small opening in the floor left a lot to be desired. Invariably our aim was off; consider 65 P.O.W.'s with chronic dysentery, in an overcrowded boxcar with bad aim. To urinate was considerably easier and our aim was far more accurate and the need to urinate was not as frequent as we were denied water that was available nearby. On March 30, 1945, after forty hours of confinement, we moved out to Fallingbostel; a 30 mile trip. We were never out of the boxcars until we reached Fallingbostel on March 30, 1945, and then marched to Stalag Luft XIB and then to nearby Stalag 357 at Orbke. "C" column split again here.

The familiar barbed wire fences and wooden barracks were, to us, an encouraging site, particularly after our last experience on the boxcars. As we approached the camps we detected the distinctive odors that are prevalent around Prisoner of War camps, the smell of burning wood and coal. There's the odor of dust and, on rainy days, mud. We were anxious to get inside the camp as opposed to the anxiety of the P.O.W.'s inside praying to get out of the camp.

After the first day at Stalag Luft XIB, we realized that there was not much of an improvement from our ordeal as when we were marching. We were led to a large circus-type tent, where a scattering of hay was placed on the ground, mostly to keep the dust from flying about, and not for bedding as we first thought.

SEVEN LOAVES OF BLACK BREAD

Survival at Stalag Luft XIB became increasingly difficult; the Red Cross Parcels were non-existent, which meant that we were totally dependent on the inconsistent ration of black bread and potatoes. Food was available for the permanent party P.O.W.'s, but we were in transit, and our food supply was what we were able to carry. I recall the day back at Stalag Luft IV, when transient P.O.W.'s arrived at Luft IV, and we made every effort to get food to them by wrapping whatever food we could afford to give in a paper or piece of cloth and throwing the packet over the fence, and in many instances, being shot at by the German guards. This camp was different. It lacked comradeship, fellowship, friendship and, most of all sharing. This camp was an international camp and the only means for survival was every man for himself. I saw a French officer, impeccably dressed, clean shaven, and well fed, strutting about as though he were

strolling along the streets of Paris anticipating the evening bounties.

It is difficult to describe as to what degree of degradation is necessary to transform a human into submitting to the tendencies of that of an animal. I firmly believe that I had reached that degree of degradation. My hunger let me submit myself to the shameful act of following a Russian prisoner of war around the camp; picking up from the ground Kohlrabi skins that were discarded by the Russian. The Kohlrabi is a kind of cabbage with an edible, bulbous stem that looks somewhat like a turnip; both the stems and root are edible and are eaten cooked or raw. I made a decision; I would sell my watch.

James Hunter Cox and I were now in a two-man concubine. Mays and Price and I were separated at the boxcar episode back at Ebbstorf. Cox hailed from Highland Park, Michigan. I had mentioned to Cox that I had intentions of selling my watch. Cox said he knew one of our fellow Kriegies that could speak Russian and probably could make a deal. The Russian prisoners of war were on daily work details outside of the camp and they were in a position to barter with the local citizens. Cox made the arrangements and I sold my watch for seven loaves of black bread. The watch was never a necessity; the guards made sure we were always on time.

AVARICE A'PLENTY

Seven loaves of black bread; I felt now that I had elevated myself above and beyond the degree of animal degradation. I had seven loaves of black bread and, with some cunning and skill in bartering, I could trade off three or four of the loaves of bread for other items of food that was available through the black market. This time I would do the trading with the American Prisoners of War that had made previous trades with the Russians. But before any deals were to be made, Cox and I sat down and ate one loaf of bread. A loaf of black bread is very dense; the main ingredient is sawdust and a calculated guess of the weight of a loaf of black bread is two and a half pounds. I had twenty-one pounds of black bread. I also had some discouraging news--we were to evacuate Stalag Luft XIB immediately. The same old familar "Rouse, Rouse". I now had nineteen pounds of bread for survival or for trading, but I also had one set-back-I could not carry nineteen additional pounds. I kept three loaves for Cox and me and the other three loaves were rationed out to the sick. Was someone with me that I could not see? Was someone asking me to share? I believe that someone's prayers, asking for food, were answered.

Before we moved out, we were told that a delousing program was mandatory and that we would participate, willingly or otherwise. We were very suspicious of the otherwise and the mandatory. We were forcibly marched out of the camp area to a small wooden building. There we were given a command to strip down balls-naked, and told that our clothing would be deloused and we would be able to take a hot shower with soap. We demanded and received permission to allow twelve P.O.W.'s to enter the showers and exit before another twelve P.O.W.'s would enter. Permission was granted, our clothing was deloused and we got our first shower in 55 days. The delousing was only temporary. We were forced to evacuate this camp. Two days later we were again encrusted by those dirty little grey bastards.

We evacuated Fallingbostel, or Stalag 357. I never knew our exact location, but both camps were in close proximity to one another. We were forced to evacuate Stalag Luft XIB on April 6, 1945. Why? One week later the camp was liberated by a British tank column that rolled up to the main gate. The next 26 days were under the jurisdication of Stalag XIB. From Dr. Leslie Caplan's Perpetuation of Testimony, December 31, 1947, I quote, "On April 6, 1945, we again went on a forced march under the jurisdication of Stalag XIB. Our first march had been in a general westerly direction, for the Germans were then running from the American and British forces. Because of this, during the march under the jurisdication of Stalag XIB, we doubled back and covered a good bit of the same territory we had just come over a month before. We doubled back over 200 kilometers and it tool 26 days before British forces liberated us. During those 26 days we were accorded much better treatment. We received a ration of potatoes daily, besides other food, including horsemeat. We also had barns to sleep in, although the weather was much milder than when we had previously covered this same territory. During

these 26 days we received about 1235 calories daily from the Germans and an additional 1500 calories daily from the Red Cross, for a total caloric intake of about 2735 calories a day. This is far more than we had in the same area from Stalag Luft IV. I believe that if the officers of Stalag Luft IV had made an effort they too could have secured as much rations and shelter." Unquote.

I have a profound respect for the late Dr. Leslie Caplan; but his statement for the caloric intake per day must have included the sour milk and rancid butter and the almost daily diet of potatoes and black bread; calories versus nutrition; a substantial diet of starch's for 86 days may contain a substantial caloric intake, but has little or no value for a prolonged period of time--86 days. We now had 26 more days of marching ahead of us and each day of marching became increasingly difficult. The blisters on our feet never healed, they only moved to different places on our feet. We made adjustments by stitching the holes in our socks, or on many occasions, marching without socks. I had fourteen blisters, seven on each foot, that never healed or changed location and, for 3 to 4 years after liberation, several of the most severe blisters left a tender area. The filth, wet, freezing cold and infection were contributing factors that are prevelant today as a reminder by a fungus that exists in the toenails called - - - - - - - - - - - - - . With knapsack and blanket roll in place, we marched out of Stalag Luft XIB and headed in an easterly direction. We were now headed toward the Russians. We crossed the Elbe River for the second time at Blickede. Our first crossing of the Elbe River was at Domitz. This was a bridge crossing. The bridge was heavily fortified with anti-aircraft gun emplacements around and on the bridge. Our second crossing of the Elbe River was a ride on a barge, towed by a tug boat. Our point of embarkation was situated in such a position that we were vulnerable to strafing by the allies. Our position was a wide open area on a peninsula that jutted out into the Elbe River. A P-51 made several passes over us, and we made every gesture we could think of to alert the P-51 pilot that we were Prisoners of War. Time did not allow us to form a P.O.W. symbol. The P-51 pilot, on his third pass, gave us a barrel roll and headed for the enemy targets. After crossing the Elbe River, we headed east for 12 kilometers to Neuhas, then north for 33 kilometers to Wittenburg, 12 more kilometers west to Zarrentin and finally 8 kilometers to Gudow and liberation. We made a 26 day march in a circle. We could have been liberated at Fallingbostel, but for some reason, known only to our captors, we were set up as clay pigeons for some trigger-happy allied pilot. I estimated our column consisted of 250 to 500 Prisoners of War, give or take 1 or 2 (hundred).

"C" column was split into two sections at Ebstorf. One section was shipped to Fallingbostel, Stalag XIB; the second section continued marching 6 miles south to Uelsen. The second section boarded the 40 and 8 boxcars and was transported to Altengrabow, Stalag XIA. Stalag XIA is 220 miles southwest of Uelsen between Magdeburg and Berlin. This was a two day trip from March 28 to March 30, 1945. It took 40 hours for the first section of "C" column to travel 30 miles, from Ebstorf to Fallingbostel, from March 28 to March 30, 1945. The second section of "C" column and other Prisoners' of War, were evacuated from Stalag XIA on April 12, 1945. They marched south for 106 miles and were liberated April 26, 1945 by the 104th Infantry Division, U.S. 1st Army.

Somewhere in Germany at another barn. One hundred yards from the barn were two large potato mounds, covered with straw and dirt. Bribes of two cigarettes to the guard would allow a Kriegie to go to the mounds and fill his shirt with potatoes. Lacking cigarettes, I tried to bribe the guard with a religious medal with my Air Corp. serial number and name engraved on the back. The guard would not accept the medal and I was not allowed to get to the potato mounds. I finally got my opportunity to sneak to the potato mound, undected by the guards. I extended my arm into the hole in the potato mound, retrieved my bounty of potatoes and returned to the safety of the barn. I still have my religious medal.

The German guards sympathetically announced the death of President F.D. Roosevelt. The announcement of President Roosevelt's death was made during a rest period on our march. There was a special and positive comradeship that existed among the P.O.W.'s and the sad news of our President's death kicked off an un-explainable magnetic desire to group together against adversity. During the rest break, we were allowed sour milk, if we wanted it, also we were allowed some black strap molasses. We accepted each. Mixing the sour milk and molasses together made a palatable drink.

I recall, on this date, helping to push a cumbersome "sick" wagon because horses were not available. (See Dr. Caplan's "Death March Medic"). Only the very sick or dying were permitted on the wagon. We took turns pushing or pulling the "sick" wagon, usually in groups of 20 or more P.O.W.'s. On many occasions, some of the P.O.W.'s that should have been on the "sick" wagon made an effort to assist, but they realized that their attempts were futile. They then would require a helping hand or a shoulder or two to lean on and someone else would share in carrying his shoulder pack. These acts, by the sick P.O.W.'s to willingly share in the hardships and knowing that they would be unable to continue for any distance, were part of that un-explainable magnetic desire.

Pushing and pulling the sick wagon down the farm lane and out onto the country road was a ponderous effort. The four wheeled wagon was a vintage piece of farm equipment that had seen better days and was in dire need of repair. The weathered, buckled and warped planking indicated that the wagon was of no further use to the farmer. The rusted metal gussets and wheel rims showed signs of collapse, as did the P.OW.'s A green slimy moss-like substance covered the water logged floor of the wagon and mold fungii encrusted several small piles of rotted horse manure; a fetid-odor that we became accustomed to.

We encountered little difficulty in steering the wagon down the two-rutted farm lane, but we dismissed any idea of maintaining any true steerage on the country road. The wagon balked at our attempts to stay on the road; a few drops of oil would have sufficed. After 5 miles of pushing, pulling and trying to steer the sick wagon, we arrived at a small farm village. Our problems were just beginning; cobblestones. On our march across Germany, we had, on several occasions, marched through small farming towns and saw our first cobblestoned streets. Through the centuries of travel, the cobblestones were rounded and very slippery, one of the P.O.W.'s pulling the wagon slipped and fell beneath the wagon. He missed being crushed to death by several inches. Several small children walked beside us chanting, "T, Flieger," "T, Flieger," this was german slang for terror flier. We were a sad looking bunch to be called "T, Fliegers."

Dr. Leslie Caplan requested medical treatment and hospitalization for the sick and dying P.O.W.'s but he was adamantly refused. That evening I was separated from the sick wagon and never saw the wagon or those sick and dying P.O.W.'s again. I can only surmise that they were left behind, eventually liberated by the Allies, or captured by the Russians and very likely the dying were permanently liberated. Our group continued marching, we marched to another small town. We arrived at a barn at night and again it was total confusion trying to find a place to bed down.

The night of April 15, 1945 was a night for prowling, the complete and total darkness was just what the Kriegies needed to secure some food. "Tommy" Harry R. Thompson from Seminole, Florida describes one of the raids. "One thing I remember on the march was staying in a barn with no food or water (about 100 of us). During this time there were only several guards around the barn. Late that night 3 Kriegies got out of the barn, slipped past the guards and went into town, (in farmland Germany the farms are the small towns), the 3 Kriegies sniffed out some sausage and took same and returned to the barn.

The following morning the 100 Kriegies were called out for formation and a German Captain (Red-headed) wanted to know who took the sausage. The German Captain threatened to shoot every third Kriegie if he was not told who the thieves were. No one said a word and no one was shot. Tommy said he had to settle for some dried peas but they were so hard that it was almost impossible to chew them. On that same day 3 Polish girls came to the barn with a pot of hot cabbage soup. The guys were like animals trying to get the soup. Not all of us had any of the soup and I remember the 3 girls crying. Later the group moved out and marched through a Naval Installation, there were lots of German sailors and we marched by a submarine docked at the wharf."

Louis Wayne Dirickson's "log" confirms the April 15th raids. A farmer gave us some milk again this morning. Left at 11:30 A.M. and walked 18 kilometers. No spuds/ no water. Some of the boys had to sleep outside. Two boys were caught in the farmer's cellar and were told they would be shot unless all of the food was returned. Everything came out O.K."

A mischievous bunch of little devils. We were as much of a problem to the Allies after our liberation as we were to the Germans during our captivity.

IN DEUTSCHLAND DAIRYLAND

"Hurry up and wait," is a service connected cliche, and was a standard cliche practiced in all branches of the military services of the United States. That is an erroneous statement. A truer statement; "Hurry up and wait," was a standard practice in all military services throughout the world, including the German command in charge of the American Prisoners of War.

The familiar morning "Rouse, Rouse" from our guards was earlier than usual. Arising before dawn, and arranging our gear in semi-darkness, was a common practice; but arising in total darkness and preparing for our days march led to total confusion and expectations of a long arduous march. Our morning roll call was held in total darkness; therefore, with a little help from us, confused the guards in their count. The count was either ten P.O.W.'s too many or one or ten P.O.W.'s missing. The frustrated guards, realizing their failures in attempting to get an accurate roll call count, allowed us to return to the barn to await daylight. We were promised a ration of boiled potatoes if our next roll call was accurate on the first count.

Fortunately our return inside the barn, and the now semi-darkness and the delay in our departure, permitted us to deploy our seek and search for food. The barn was situated on a side of a hill with our sleeping area at ground level; beneath us was a cellar-like area with one side accessible to the outside through huge doors. This was the dairy heartland of Germany and we were confined to a large dairy farm. The cows below us provided our first fresh milk in a long, long time. With some difficulty, we lowered a buddy to the cow area, and the milking began, with due consideration to the cows being not to milk one cow dry, which would lead the farmer to think that one cow was not producing its quoto and would end up in the butcher shop.

The next roll call was flawless, every head in place, and the standing count and the sick count inside the barn matched the guards roster. We now eagerly awaited our potato ration; but again, our departure was delayed - the potatoes were not ready. This further delay gave us the opportunity to partially strip down and proceed to pick and crush those lousy little grey bastards. The delay also gave us the opportunity to witness Hitler's edict to create a pure Aryan Race. A buxom blonde Fraulein and two German officers entered an adjacent barn and sometime later reappeared at the hayloft opening, and each with a chessy-cat grin on their faces. We returned our sentiments with the all American salute; the middle finger extended beyond a clenched fist.

The potato ration was ready; we formed two lines and were allotted two large boiled potatoes. These potatoes came directly from a vat of boiling water. We had to turn our knit helmet liner caps inside out and use the cap to receive the potatoes. We were not permitted to eat the potatoes at a standstill, we had to form into columns and move out.

THE BUTTER CAPER

We arrived at our next destination in total darkness an estimated ten hour march, with nothing to each except some morsels from our depleted Red Cross parcel or a small chunk of stale, hardened, black bread; to expect any food from our captors at this time of the night would be ludicrous. We were starving and exhausted, but still had something to be thankful for -- we were not wet and freezing.

We encountered a unique and different type of sleeping environment since our usual country farm and barn or on the ground sleeping place changed. We were now in close proximity to a large town. We marched through the streets and entered through an iron gated stone archway into a cobbled stone courtyard. Cobblestones are always wet and make walking very difficult. Our sleeping quarters were stables and the odor of recently departed equine inhabitants was readily detected. Before we could finish making our straw beds, we were told that there was food available and to form a line outside the stable. Within 30 seconds, we were ready and waiting. We expected more potatoes, but in the dim light of the guards shaded flashlights we could see a huge wooden wagon with yellowish blocks suggesting a possibility of cheese. Our elation soon diminished. Although the first bite into the yellow

brick proved differently. We all had a pound of rancid butter! We ate it and suffered for it later.

Price, Mays and I were still concubines. Prentice H. Price was a Mississippi boy whose ambition before, during and after the war was to become a minister. I wrote a poem in my Log Book about all of the P.O.W.'s in Room #9, Barracks #3, Stalag Luft IV. It's called "Kriegie Characters: and the little dittie about Price was:

Prentice H. Price is a character,
The Golden Gate he's seekin.
He's usually reading the Bible
Cause he's the room's Chief Deacon.

It may be corny, but to this day I can recall each of the thirty-three P.O.W.'s in Room #9. After we received our pound of rancid butter, Price approached Mays and I and told us that he had been praying for food during the entire days march and continued praying for food even when it seemed hopeless. Then he said his prayers were answered; even though rancid butter was his reward, he still kept the faith. He then admitted that he took an extra pound of the rancid butter that would have deprived another P.O.W. of his share. He said he was going back to return the butter, but we tried to convince him that his taking the butter was actually helping a fellow P.O.W. There had been more than enough to go around. After some of the P.O.W.'s had tasted the butter many more could have had seconds. Price returned the butter to the wagon. I guess the moral of the story is, "Don't steal rancid butter.".

DAY 85

May 1, 1945 ZARRENTIN

Our arrival at Zarrentin was just one more day of sleeping in a barn and sifting through and around the farm for any signs of food. We were told that a cow would be slaughtered for us for food, and much to our surprise, the farmer actually slaughtered one of his cows, but the anticipated delight of a feast of fresh meat was short lived. We were ordered to move out immediately, while the farmer was still in the process of dressing the cow. Not to be deprived of fresh meat, I confiscated the cow's heart in belief that this portion of meat would carry with less spoilage than other portions. Why? I don't know! I placed this bloody heart in a cardboard carton and prepared to move out.

Escape was still the utmost concern of every "Kriegie" and any opportunity should be taken advantage of to escape. Of course, it was impossible for everyone to make an escape attempt at the same time, but it might be possible for one or two to make an attempt. But on this day - not knowing our liberation was a day off, more than 20 Kriegies decided to remain in the barn, burrowing beneath tons of hay, hoping the German guards would overlook their absence and leave the farm without them. This method of escape always failed and only delayed our departure, for if 500 Kriegies came into a farm, 500 must be counted to leave. So a head count was taken and 20 showed up missing. The German guards had a very simple method of retrieving the missing Kriegies. They ordered them to come out of the barn, otherwise they would shoot into the hay. Verbal orders were ignored, but with the first round of machine gun fire, the roll call was completed and we were on our way with 20 "Kriegies" spitting hay and much wiser for the abortive attempt to escape.

Our next destination, and how far we would walk, was unknown. We left late in the morning and arrived at the next farm late in the afternoon. This would indicate that we walked about 8 kilometers or to the outskirts of the small town of Gudow. Again, we were rejected by the farmer to sleep in his barn because we were covered with lice and would contaminate his barn. His objections were overruled by the German officer in command and we would bed down for the night.

I still had this bloody cow's heart in the cardboard box, and without cooking facilities, but an unusual request by the Germans for two Kriegies that had any cooking experience, I put my skinny frame within two feet of the German guard and 10 minutes later I was stoking a fire under a boiler lined with 50 lbs. of unpeeled potatoes and one bloody cow's heart. My cooking partner and I feasted on boiled potatoes and the cow's heart, sharing the heart with others. After three to four vats of boiled potatoes, we bedded down for the night.

DAY 86 LIBERATION DAY

May 2, 1945 Gudow:

Unknown to us, our liberation was but hours away. Our usual get-up time was 5 o'clock in the morning. Many of us would be out earlier scouring the farm for extras. If you could sneak between the guards, you may have raw eggs for breakfast, or, if you could locate the potato storage bin, you were in for a 2 or 3 day supply.

Rumors, although many times unfounded, were now seeming to be a reality. The Germans issued canned sardines, and seconds if you desired. The canned sardines in oval cans with oil or tomato sauce were the same ones found in the U.S.A.

Our last command by the German guards was to pack up and walk down the farm lane to the main road and there we were liberated by the British 8th Army, "The Royal Dragoons". James Hunter Cox decided he would no longer walk, even to liberation. He acquired the farmer's horse and rode to liberation with the irate farmer, on the run behind Cox, firing obscene gestures and language at him. Cox reined his mighty steed and beckoned me to mount behind him. I convinced Cox to dismount since our liberation point was only another 500 yards ahead and the irate farmer was only 50 yards behind.

At approximately 11:50 A.M. on May 2, 1945 we were liberated. A British command car, with numerous tanks arrear, welcomed us back to freedom. After the tumultuous cheering and welcoming had cleared, the British were appalled because the German guards were still carrying the weapons and we had made no attempt to disarm them. We never gave a thought to disarming them. If they hadn't used them for 86 days while in command, then why should they use them now, since now, they were the prisoners of war and not us. The tables were turned.

The British pointed in a southwesterly direction and directed us to our next destination, a small town called Buchen, 15 kilometers away. A final impression of the end to our ordeal was a German guard seated with his back against a tree eating knockwurst and rye bread. I was half tempted to share his lunch with him but I had a change of heart, knowing better fare would be awaiting us at Buchen. A 2 kilometer walk proved that better and more nourishing fare was to be had in the form of fresh milk and cheese. It did not take long for the now ex-P.O.W.'s to sniff out a dairy and the klim cans, that once contained powdered milk, were now filled with fresh milk. One of the more enterprising ex-P.O.W.'s was passing out large chunks of cheese from a 50 lb. wheel of cheese. One large gulp of milk and one large chunk of cheese was one of the most satisfying feelings we had encountered in a long time. The white lines of milk streaming down both sides of our cheeks was a delightful sign that the word glutton would again become a part of our vocabularly; but most of all there was a picture that no artist could capture, and that was the elation in the eyes of each ex-P.O.W.

Buchen is a small farming town situated on a canal and 14 kilometers north of Lauenburg. Here at Buchen we saw the first signs of World War II from the ground. The British had 30 German P.O.W.'s, probably our guards, lined up with arms folded over their heads in the typical surrender pose. Each P.O.W. was stripped of all of his personal belongings and these personal belongings, along with his military gear, were thrown in a nearby pile. From this pile we collected our first souvenirs. My booty consisted of a military map of Germany and a German canteen and kit.

The British started to use force on the German P.O.W.'s to emphasize their authority. I questioned the use of this force used by a British Officer, particularly on one young German P.O.W. that was soon to be separated from his girlfriend or wife. The British Officer told me that this treatment was quite mild as compared to the treatment given to some of the German P.O.W.'s captured by the Americans. The British Officer said, "Your Blokes hung two of them upside down in a well".

A modern red brick house was to be our lodging place for that evening. The house was unoccupied but completely furnished, fully intact, except for one corner of the house that had been removed by a British tank that was unable to maneuver a sharp turn on a narrow street. The beds were made as though the occupants had not anticipated any interruption of their daily routine. The first-come, first-serve basis of selection was in affect. Cox and I were late arrivals and the only available sleeping space left was the living room floor; the living room floor proved to be 100% better than any of our previous lodgings. Of course, we still had our little blood sucking traveling companions with us, lice. The damage to the house was far less than the damage we created by our presence. It was probably a lot less expensive to repair the damaged corner of the house than to have the house fumigated. A hot cup of tea, a hearty bowl of soup and some biscuits made our liberation day. Anxiety and anticipation of tomorrow's expectations would cushion our bodies from the hard floor. This was like Christmas Eve, on May 2, 1945.

May 3, 1945 dawned bright and sunny. After a restful sleep and a hot breakfast and a road to freedom, we were now under the allied military control and would again have to abide by the rules and regulations of G.I. control. Of course, we would not and did not. A British officer drew a map on the side of a wagon. He told us a canal barge was wedged across the canal and we would be able to cross the canal at that point. All bridges were destroyed either

by the retreating Germans or the advancing Allies. After crossing the canal, Cox and I headed toward our final destination which was 30 to 40 kilometers more to travel on the "Shoe Leather Express". I decided that was too far to walk since we were now in allied territory and well behind the front lines. I told Cox that I would not walk another step and if the Americans wanted me back in the Army, they would have to come and get me. The only walking I had planned for the future was walking to the mess hall. Cox agreed with me and the two of us lay down by the roadside and waited for transportation. At first we thought our decision was made in haste. We were on a dirt road that intersected with another dirt road and it appeared that we may have to spend the night out in the open, for there was no traffic whatsoever. But after a half hour of restful bliss, a British truck came by and offered us transportation. The British driver told us that he would take us to our destination but with one condition, and that condition was that both truck windows were to remain open for the entire trip. We had not showered or shaved for 26 days. It was obvious to Cox and me that the driver would have preferred that we rode in the back of the truck; he lit a cigarette, he did not inhale, but he did blow three large puffs of smoke into the cab. The driver offered Cox and me a cigarette. He then thrust his head through the open window for fresh air and then pushed the accelerator pedal to the floor and sped down the dirt road, heading in the general direction of Hanover, Germany.

The collecting area, arranged by the Allies to receive the influx of the now ex-Prisoners of War, was a former German officers' training academy. The huge two storied modern brick barracks surrounded a paved parade area. Cox and I gave the British truck driver a half hearted salute; the truck driver returned our salute in the same half hearted manner. We entered the parade area and we were instructed to immediately find a room and a bed in any barracks and report to a supply room for a complete change of uniform, then for a hot shower and a shave, get de-loused, and then to the mess hall for a light meal, and then on to the barber shop for a haircut. Our short walk across the parade area was accompanied by the usual army expletives from the ex-Prisoner of War who had arrived earlier in the week; it proved that a hot shower and a good meal is a great elixir.

Since we were liberated by the British, fed and clothed by the British, and under the jurisdication of the British, we considered ourselves as still free lance and only responsible to the discipline that is required to maintain order and respect to our liberators. Of course the rules and regulations were not enforced to any harsh degree, unless warranted. There were some occasions when some over-zealous Prisoner of War would fire one of the stockpiled German rifles in the air; this act was frowned upon by the British and all of the ex-Prisoners of War. We did not want a telegram sent to our families saying "Killed by a fellow ex-Prisoner of War". Again, since we were liberated by the British, we were issed British uniforms. Our tattered, filthy, lice-ridden G.I. uniforms were piled in the center of the parade yard and set afire. We waved goodbye to those lousy little grey, bloodsucking bastards.

May 4, 1945? We were transported by truck to the outskirts of Celle or Soltrau (?) on the Aller River, Northwest of Hanover, Germany. At Celle we camped out in tents but we were well fed, clean and awaiting transportation to Camp Lucky Strike in France. We were instructed to remain "on the ready to move at a moment's notice". That evening, two British trucks moved between the tents, and a British soldier announced that limited transportation was available. I was the last ex-Prisoner of War to board the second truck. Jim Cox was still with me. When we arrived at a makeshift airfield, the first truck was unloaded and the ex-P.O.W.'s boarded a C-47. The plane was ready to take off and we thought we would return to tent city for another night, but a British soldier announced that there was room for one more. I made that flight and waved goodbye to Jim Cox. After we were airborne, the pilot announced that we would not go to Camp Lucy Strike in France; instead we would fly directly to England. The war, except for the signing of the unconditional surrender by the Germans, was over.

We arrived in England, somewhere around Oxford, about 9:00 P.M. that evening. One of the hangars was set up to receive us. We were given a delousing spray in our hair, armpits and crotch. With this humiliating exercise out of the way, we were then seated at an informal table and given tea and cookies. Each ex-Prisoner of War received individual, sympathetic, and concerned attention from the British. They asked questions and were very attentive and cooperative. They gave us that warm feeling that, again, we were human. After our welcome to England, we boarded buses to a hospital in the country. We again showered and were told that the mess hall was open and would remain open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and that we could eat all we wanted, whenever we wanted; but we were cautioned to take food in small amounts for a period of time and not to overeat. The menu that night was creamed chicken, mashed potatoes, salt and pepper, milk, tea, coffee, hot white bread, fruit salad, etc. We over-ate and were sick, but what a delightful way to be sick. We returned to the hospital ward, put on clean pajamas, crawled between clean, sweet-smelling sheets, pulled the blankets over our heads, the lights went out and, without scratching, freezing, thirsting, starving, walking, aching and dying, we said a prayer of thanks and went off to sleep.

A two-week stay at the hospital was sufficient time to fatten our bodies and then we were released to the American command as healthy American soldiers, fit for duty. I do not recall, at any time, from the day we were liberated (May 2, 1945) until our return to the United States, ever stepping on a scale to be weighed. I question this. I feel it was an intentional act by the Armed Services as a deterent to make future claims for physical disabilities that may accrue in later years. Today, after 38 years, this has proven to be true. From the Oxford Hospital, we were shipped to London to await debarkation to the United States. Two weeks in London and we were off on an L.S.T. to America and an Honorable Discharge; October, 1945.