

green hornet, snake eyes, dirty Gus, snaggle tooth and "big stoop". He in my opinion was the worse of the lot. He was just mean to be mean.

Entertainment, the big event each week was when the honey wagon would come into the compound to collect human waste. One day it blew up spreading you know what all over.

We occasionally would hear artillery fire in the distance, and rumors had it that the Russians weren't far away. Hopes were high that we would be liberated. Incidentally, the Germans were scared to death of the Russians due to the massacres of hundreds of thousands of Russian men, women and children (300,000 in one incident), one million in Leningrad.

On February 5, 1945 word came down that we were moving out the next morning. By this time I had received additional clothes. The next morning was very cold and wet. A small amount of food was stuffed in my pockets along with other personal items. They gave me a full Red Cross parcel, and two blankets that I rolled up and tied the ends together and hung them diagonally over one shoulder across my opposite side. Oh yes, I also carried powdered milk (Klim) for eating and drinking. Klim is milk spelled backwards.

Previously it had been decided that the four of us would stay together due to friendship and sharing our food. Incidentally Red Cross parcels consisted of small quantities of raisins, liver pate, powdered milk, coffee, soap, sugar, chocolate bar, margarine, salmon, cheese, and cigarettes. Cigarettes established the rate of exchange for trading. We left camp four abreast having no idea where we were going other than being told we would march about 20 kilometers to another camp. A kilometer = .6214 miles.)

I was a little luckier than most because some German words had come back to me from childhood when my grandparents didn't want me to know what they were talking about, they would speak German, along with what I had picked up in camp gave me the ability to translate orders to the other men.

The guards did not hesitate to use their bayonets and rifle butts to keep us prodding along. In our already weakened condition it wasn't long before the things we were carrying became very heavy. Those that fell out of line to relieve themselves or just plain exhaustion were in great danger of being either hit with a rifle butt or bayoneted. To hopefully offset this we agreed that if one would fall out, the other three would fall out too. I passed one fellow that had been bayoneted on the side of the road. I don't know if he survived or not. Severe dysentery was an ongoing problem. And I ate charcoal to help the situation. Toilet paper was scarce so we would use grass, leaves or our hands.

At the end of each day we might stay in a barn if not it would be out in the cold in a field. We generally had some thin soup, a piece of bread and maybe a potato. Sometimes I managed to trade for some horse meat and occasionally for sugar beets. Two of us would generally huddle together keep warm. One night after a long march I was really sick and exhausted, normally, I never slept soundly, but that night I really crashed. All of a sudden something hit me a tremendous blow on the chest. It knocked the wind out of me. All I heard was someone saying "I got him, I got him". It was my companion, he had killed a rat that was on my chest. I gutted it in the semi darkness and put it in one of my boots, which I used, for a pillow. The next day we lucked out, and traded for a couple of carrots, a kohlrabi (like a turnip) and along with two potatoes (karloffels) and bread (black broat) and our newly acquired rat, the four of us had a fantastic feast.

The dysentery, malnutrition, the ever present lice (which nibbled on you at night), and frost bite were ongoing problems. At night we would remove our boots and socks and massage each others feet to warm them and get the blood circulating.

Going through the larger towns was a real problem. The Hitler Youth would sic their dogs on us while yelling terra-fleigers (terrorist from the air). One Hitler youth attacked me with a dagger. He slashed my finger when I tried to protect myself. The guard also hit me in the back with the butt of his rifle, because he thought I was going to hit the youth. For the most part the German people were not abusive and would trade with us, but keep in mind they had very little themselves.

The thought of escape certainly crossed my mind but I always came back to safety in numbers. Bombers overhead were always a concern. The weather was getting warmer and I noticed that the more obnoxious guards were disappearing. The older ones were still walking along with us. Believe it or not, I along with other POWs carried their rifles.

Next stop was Brussels, Belgium at which point I watched every stitch of my clothing going into a pile to be burned. I had a full beard and hair down to my shoulders. I was deloused, had a real shower, the first since bailing out. I remembered how weak I was after a half hour in the shower. Yes, the shave and haircut and, delousing was unreal, I felt naked. I received a new issue of clothing.

Within a day or two we were on our way by plane to Camp Lucky Strike near the port of Le Havre, France, where I was checked over physically. My weight had gone down to 118 pounds from 150. Within a few days we were boarded on a Liberty ship and I got a job in the kitchen the best KP (kitchen police) in as much as I could eat what I wanted. The scary part was I could put one foot on the bulkhead and the other foot on another and feel the ship move between.

We went to England and picked up additional personnel. I don't remember how long we were at sea but I surely remembered how beautiful the Statue of Liberty looked. After a short stay at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey my kriegie companions and I separated, two to a hospital in Rhode Island, one to a hospital in California and I to Lovell General Hospital in Massachusetts suffering from leg, hip, back and shoulder injuries as well as malnutrition, most of which still remain with me to this day.

Prayers and our flag carried my companions and myself through. Unfortunately, we didn't appreciate either until we needed them.

