

23rd January 1945 Tuesday. marched from KNUROW 6.30 pm. Deep snow and icy roads. German troops at regular intervals in arctic uniforms. Russians attacking KATOWICE clearly visible.

24th January 1945. Arrived REIGETAU 7.30 am. Jewish working camp previously evacuated. Lousy. Endeavoured to receive radio news despite tiredness.

25/26th January 1945. Marched off 1 am early morning. We crossed over the River Oder at KREUZENORT at 7.10 am and marched to BIELAU at 3 pm. Foolishly, I wanted to transport on the sledge which I had made the first Russian who had dropped out of the march, exhausted. The others, 'Curly' Craker and 'Taffy' Morgan, said it was hard enough struggling along without the extra weight – which was sensible. The Russian was probably the first of hundreds shot en-route.

27th January 1945. We left BIELAU at 3 pm and arrived in BOLETITZ at 6.30 pm where we occupied a very large farm loft. I surprised everybody by getting a bath to wash in.

29th January 1945. Having been force-marched westward across the River Oder the Germans were expecting to stop the Russian advance along that river, but at 8 am we left BOLETITZ and marched throughout the day to STAUDING arriving at 8.30 pm. The Germans had horse-drawn ration carts here and we received a small supply of bread.

When marching through one town inside the Czech border we were subjected to loud propaganda over the installed tannoy system.

31st January 1945. We left STAUDING at 8 am and marched to MANKENDORF arriving at 7 pm. The desperately cold weather was showing signs of improving and we were concerned whether we could continue to sledge our belongings much further.

For several years I had secretly operated a 6-valve wireless set in the POW Camp and provided daily news bulletins to the 250 POW's in the camp. Despite it measuring one foot cube, we had it stowed away on board the sledge.

By good fortune at MANKENDORF we were herded into an existing POW Camp for Englishmen working in a local timber yard. Maybe because they were few in number it was known that they were to remain there while we continued marching westward. This information enabled me to establish a deal with their Camp Leader to exchange our radio set for five Red Cross parcels of food. (One each for members of the sledge team.)

1st February 1945. We rested here at MANKENDORF and each man received a ladle of potato soup.

2nd February 1945. We were sorry to leave at 9 am and arrived in LINDENAU

at 4 pm where we slept in a large barn, with little protection from the wind.

Some local people brought us food.

3rd February 1945. We left LINDENAU at 9 am marching throughout the day to arrive at DOLOPLATZ at 7.30 pm inside Moravia.

The German morale was very low, with the news that the Russian troops had reached the outskirts of Berlin.

4/5/6th February 1945. We remained in DOLOPLATZ where the people displayed their friendship and kindness, bringing food to the camp. Rumours of the war having ended created uncertainty with everyone – including the German guards.

7th February 1945. We finally were marched away at 9 am from DOLOPLATZ and arrived in STEPANOV at 4.30 pm where we were "housed" in a farm-barn.

Uncertainty prevailed and we were very excited about the prospects of Germany capitulating.

9th February 1945. We moved on again at 9 am from STEPANOV and arrived at LÖSTICE (LOSHITZ) at 6 pm, where we were supposedly guarded in a large disused brewery. I managed to break into a store cupboard and later Dixon and I got out into the town and were invited into a house for food – although the local folk were anxious that we did not stay long – for fear of our being caught in their house.

The local people came to the main gates of the brewery with food to distribute.

Everyone thought that within hours peace would be declared, so Dixon and I returned to the confine of the camp. The guards were confused!

11th February 1945. When we eventually left LÖSTICE brewery at 9.20 am, in front of everyone 'Barney' kissed a local girl to express our gratitude to them and everyone cheered and broke into song as we continued our long march. Somehow it proved to the Germans that they could not break our spirit. We arrived at GRÖSSE JESTREB at 3.20 pm where we slept in a farm loft. It was here that the Sudeten farmer removed the pump-shaft from his water well – denying us water!! It was a bad billet!

12th February 1945. Cyril Shaw had proved that after the African campaign and being shipwrecked crossing the Mediterranean, caused by Allied bombing, that he possessed "nine lives", so when he suggested that we escaped I hesitatingly agreed because I considered the odds against us!

With eighteen inches of snow everywhere we approached a village to find it occupied by German troops which left us no alternative but to skirt the village by taking to the fields. Across the clear white expanse of snow we were obviously visible for miles! A flat-capped uniformed person was converging towards us,

when we decided to try and pretend that we were foreign Hungarian workers (wearing khaki), because it is impossible to run in deep snow! It transpired that he was an armed railway official who was more nervous of us than vice-versa. At first he backed away and fumbled for his pistol, which in German I told him he didn't require. I "took the mickey" out of him by telling him he could claim a large reward for our recapture.

When escorting us through the village we really were extremely very lucky when a German staff car pulled alongside us and out stepped a Senior Officer to enquire what was happening. When the railway police official said that he was taking us to a POW Camp in the village, the German Army Officer said that "No, he wasn't, that was for Russian POW's". Had this officer not intervened, the possibility is that we could have been shot! Shaw's luck AND MINE remained!! We were returned to our camp, probably without punishment because we had to march on.

14th February 1945. We left at 8.30 am and arrived in TATTENITZ at 2.30 pm to receive three potatoes and a portion of bread each.

Throughout all the long march we had to keep to minor roads, and keep the major routes open for German Army transport movements.

15th February 1945. We left TATTENITZ at 8.30 am and arrived at THOMISDORF about noon where we occupied (if that's the correct word) a large dance hall which, at one end of the building had the caretaker's private apartment. Needless to relate this was an invitation for someone to break into the private apartment in search of food – and it happened with hell to pay!! Everybody had to place their belongings on the floor in front of them and they were body-searched. My concern was keeping concealed several maps which I possessed, which fortunately I succeeded in doing, by having them on the inside of my lower sleeve, between the elbow and wrist.

Not so good for the culprit 'Chunky' McCrae who was caught red-handed.

He was punished and we all lost our daily ration! This action prompted some of us to discuss whether we should try and escape into PRAGUE which wasn't too far away? Surely the war could not last much longer!

18th February 1945. After hungry rest days, four men were detailed to go with a German guard to collect several days rations from a German Army Supply Depot. I managed to get on the working party with the intention of obtaining additional food (OK you can call it stealing!). I knew that anything I stole had to be divided by four (the working party) and then by four again (the original sledge team), meaning I would receive one-sixteenth of the spoils.

When we arrived at the depot – which simply consisted of numerous carts covered with tarpaulins standing in a field – there were German soldiers everywhere.

It was suggested that when the German in charge of allocating the rations (loaves of bread, tins of meat etc) arrived on the scene, I would keep our guard occupied with continual conversation to divert his attention while the others "worked a double shuffle". This simply means taking six instead of five, or taking five and forgetting to include it in the count. After some time I enquired how my mates were progressing, only to discover that they thought the task was impossible with so many "Krauts" around. I suggested that one of them changed roles with me – and then I went into action!!

The rations we collected were placed on a very large wooden three-wheel handcart, which meant that when we arrived back at the dance hall we were faced with the prospects of unloading the cart, which would have enabled our guard to recheck the rations, or alternatively, as I suggested, trying to mount three steps into the dance hall, with me holding the shafts and the others giving the cart an almighty push.

Unfortunately, the cart trapped my left ankle between the bottom of the cart and the top step, to prove that the extra rations were not worth a busted ankle!

19th February 1945. When we left THOMISDORF at 8 am I managed to obtain a ride on the horse drawn vehicle carrying the guards' equipment, and when we arrived at JANS DORF at 2.45 pm I managed to have the ankle tightly bandaged.

20th February 1945. Departing at 8.30 am, we crossed into Bohemia at LITOMYSIL about 9.30 am where the people rushed to the column of POW's with loaves of bread, resulting in the police lining the roads to prevent it. We eventually stopped at VRACOVICE at 2 pm.

21st February 1945. Leaving next day at 8 am we arrived at our destination – another barn this time at OSTETIN about 1.40 pm. When we marched through the very large town of CHOZIN the loudspeakers were blazing out propaganda – emphasising that the authorities were rather alarmed about public sympathy toward our column.

22nd February 1945. My notes indicate that we received a punishment on this day – probably no food was issued.

23rd February 1945. We left at 7.45 am and after eight hours marching arrived at OSPALOWITZ at 3.45 pm. We crossed the River Elbe near WYKORSA-ANDER-ELBE about 2.25 pm, where I was fascinated to observe the red soil in the surrounding countryside.

It may interest the reader to learn that for part of the journey, to help take my mind off this hazardous trek, while marching along I spent the time glancing at a book teaching shorthand (which I have never properly learnt).

24th February 1945. We continued our endless march at 7.30 am from OSPALOWITZ and arrived at FÜLLENHOF at 10.45 am. The farmer here was

happy to relate that he had spent five years in Canada. My notes state that the civilians brought soup and bread for us, and perhaps it was here where four women, each carrying two buckets of soup on a yoke, walked over the mountains seven or eight miles to personally deliver it – not even knowing whether the guards would permit this humanity!

26th February 1945. Despite the wind and rain we set off at 7.30 am and arrived at SADOVIA at 11.45 am, where we did not appreciate the bad smell of hops.

27th February 1945. A showery day and a four hour trek, commencing at 7.45 am and terminating at 11.45 am at HOLUFOS where yet another barn awaited our discomfort.

28th February 1945. My notes say that we rested and were issued potatoes, when one realises that was a special diary entry, perhaps it will help the reader comprehend our plight!

1st March 1945. We enter another month by marching for 4½ hours between 7.45 am and noon, arriving at AULIWITZ, to rest in an old barn situated behind the local police headquarters.

2nd March 1945. This day brought bitterly cold driving wind and snow, but we continued the march at 7.45 am and arrived at noon at LIBON, where we cooled off waiting in the arctic conditions for an hour as a punishment because several chaps had not maintained strict column discipline – the b*****ds!

The vertical wooden struts of the barn were about ¾" apart which enabled the weather outside to penetrate and freeze us inside!

3rd March 1945. We had cold soup and bread, and as if to try and reestablish that they were human, they issued everyone with lettercards to write home.

Can you imagine some letters that were written but would never arrive home? Listen to this, listen to this!

4th March 1945. The weather was terribly cold with persistent snow, but this did not prevent us marching on at 7.15 am, to arrive in JUDENDORF at 2 pm in the afternoon where another uncomfortable barn awaited us.

5th March 1945. Again next morning at 7.15 am we were "en route" again and marched 7¼ hours until 3 pm in the afternoon, when we arrived at UBER SLINNO. It continued to snow quite heavily.

6th March 1945. Today we rested and we received very meagre rations. Our guards were excited having received some white bread rolls for themselves. It was now really very cold weather and conditions.

7th March 1945. Next day, in a driving snowstorm, we set off at 7 am to arrive at KLOMIN about 1.45 pm.

8th March 1945. Again we marched off westward at 7 am to arrive at BUINOTITZ

at 12.45 pm, where my records state for once it was a good billett (if that's the word!).

9/10th March 1945. We were pleased to rest here for two days. There were strong rumours that Berlin was under attack, and one sensed that both the German guards and civilians thought the war would soon end.

The local civilians brought food to us.

11th March 1945. Further orders and we marched off again at 7 am to arrive at the town of SCHISCHITZ at 10.45 am.

12th March 1945. My records reveal of agitation prevailing and that the German guards brought in dogs during the night. The German Command was obviously deeply concerned about the open display by the local inhabitants to feed us, and several of us slipped out into the town. I went out with Dixon, and we were welcomed into a nearby home. I cannot remember my involvement here, but after the war the town's archivist (who as Mayor at the time) wrote and requested me to revisit their town, or send a photograph taken at that time.

13th March 1945. We were sorry to leave at 7 am and I encouraged everyone to sing "Tipperary" as we marched off through the town. Needless to write the German guards were not very pleased, but completely powerless and demoralised.

When we marched through the town of SOPLAN we received a wonderful encouraging reception from the local people.

After 6¼ hours, at 1.15 pm we arrived at our destination KORNHAUS.

14th March 1945. We were all very pleased to witness the first sign of Spring and milder weather. We set off from KORNHAUS at the usual hour of 7 o'clock and arrived at NESUCHEN at 1 pm. It was here that the civilians organised a collection of food for us – finding it difficult to believe our suffering.

We managed to obtain sufficient water which enabled me to wash my shirt, vest, towel and handkerchiefs – long overdue!

15th March 1945. Fortunately a rest day on a really warm spring-like day, so I had a stripdown standing bath – what a special treat!

16th March 1945. Next day we left at 8 am and arrived at TSCHENSCHITZ (PETERSBURG) at 1.30 pm where we saw an International Red Cross depot.

17th March 1945. 8 o'clock the following day we continued marching to arrive at LUBENZ at 11.30 pm.

18th March 1945. The stupid farmer actually removed the pumping handle from his well to prevent us obtaining any water. This was a rest day and our portion of food for two days was one slice of bread.

19 March 1945. It was fortunate for the farmer that we left his barn at 7 am and

arrived at GABHORN at 3.45 pm, where we stood until 5 pm before learning which barn they were putting us into. The bombing raid added to the confusion and we sensed that our guards realised the futility of the situation.

20th March 1945. After eight hours delayed marching we arrived at NEUDORF at 3 pm having crossed the River Eger at about midday. Although I haven't mentioned the difficult routes we were compelled to take throughout this hazardous route – it was not exactly an afternoon's casual stroll. It was on this sector that the marching column was brought to a halt on a very steep incline of several miles in length.

The horse pulling the German guards' equipment and provisions had dropped dead through exhaustion and we waited while some Russian POW's skinned it to provide food for later.

During the day we marched past some English chaps I knew at BLECHHAMMER – Ray Maine, 'Rabbit' Hare and Simpson.

I think that it was during that day we marched alongside a column of Russian POW's and my friend Boris (standing head and shoulders above the others) shouted to me to draw my attention. I was overjoyed to learn that he had also survived so far – although we had no idea what the near future would bring.

21st March 1945. We experienced another bombing raid.

In this billet we were sleeping in a loft of a very large barn, which was situated quite close to the farmhouse.

As each man carried one blanket, four of us decided to sleep together, with two blankets below on the ground or floor and two blankets above. Often we only removed our boots.

It was about 5.30 am, everyone tired and fast asleep, with perhaps one exception, my chum 'Curly' Craker who was lying next to me (on the outside). He woke me and whispered "A hen has flown into the loft and I think that I can catch it, remain quiet". He silently slipped out of bed, returning the next minute with a black hen. He had caught it and tucked its head under its wing to stop it "quaking". With this bird between us in the bed, we then quickly wrung its neck and completely plucked off its feathers.

'Curly' said "We will have this boiled and eaten before the farmer realises that he has lost a chicken".

Between us we shared the task of carrying a "Blower" – or so it was named. This fairly lightweight "contraption" was constructed with two empty tins and a fan-wheel. It was simply a "wind-tunnel", which rapidly enflamed kindling wood, when the fan-wheel was rotated by hand. This invention enabled us to cook and devour the tough old hen, before anyone was aware that we were not brewing tea this time!

22nd March 1945. Despite having recently struggled up very steep roads I did not mind marching back down some of them. TSM Curtis had to select three men to accompany him, under guard escort, to obtain food parcels from the International Red Cross. The chosen men had to be really tough and fit for the task in hand, and they were Ken Watkins (Gloucester Regiment), 'Gus' – a big Australian and myself.

I think that I am correct in stating that we marched from PETSCHIN to AUSHAWITZ from where we loaded Red Cross parcels into their large white coloured lorries clearly marked, then travelled through the beautiful town of MARIENBAD and finally off-loaded the parcels and establish a distribution depot at ABESCHIN.

That night TSM Curtis and myself remained at ABESCHIN under guard escort.

23rd March 1945. The following day we had to issue parcels to another echelon or column of British POW's.

24th March 1945. Then we returned to our camp party E75* to distribute them with parcels and also establish another small depot there at PLAN. We were subjected to regular air raids.

* Perhaps I should clarify that this journey was undertaken on horse-drawn waggons.

During the afternoon the Camp Commandant, Feldtwebel Steller, announced that he wished to speak to a representation of four POW's who could understand German.

Once again I was chosen to hear what he wished to tell us. Obviously he was becoming very concerned about his future responsibilities and situations likely to arise before the end of the war. He explained that really he was a poet and not a professional soldier, and sought our understanding. Naturally, he was rather afraid.

25th March 1945. We remained at the newly established Red Cross parcel depot in the town of PLAN. It was a sunny day and I had the opportunity to wash and dry every stitch of clothing in an old metal bath which I found. Then I completed the delousing and cleanliness exercise by having a bath in the cold water myself, undeterred by the American Flying Fortresses' bombing raid – which we welcomed.

26th March 1945. The following day TSM Curtis and I issued Serbians, guarded by the German No 3 Company, with Red Cross parcels and then at 11 am with a German guard we marched from PLAN through the town of HAID to ROSSHAUPT, a distance of 40 kilometres. Actually we marched 20 km with full packs, 10 km without heavy packs, and all rode on a horse-drawn waggon the rest of the journey.

27th March 1945. This was a rest day, and there seemed to be "an air of uncertainty" prevailing just as if the German Command did not know where to march us. Unfortunately 'Curly' Craker was sick – perhaps following decent food after such a long time!

28th March 1945. Then we were on the march again, leaving ROSSHAUPT at 8 am and six hours later at 2 pm reaching BURGKREWITZ, and kept overnight in yet another barn.

29th March 1945. The next morning we were marched off again at 8 am to SCHAMESREITH, and the strain was taking its toll with 'Taffy' Morgan feeling sick and unwell. The rumours about the Allied and Russian advance on both sides kept our morale high, but whatever the future held in store for us we realised that our lives "remained in the balance".

30-31st March 1945. For two following days we were pleased to be rested, especially during the torrential rainstorms.

1st April 1945. Easter Sunday and we certainly were not going to Church Service. At 7.30 am we were on the road again, marching through the town of WEIDEN to a farm at FRAUENSRIECHT. The air raids were continuous and rather close for comfort when witnessing the leading American plane position a "smoke circle" over the target area and then the following Squadrons unload their bombs. When the bombs fell they were so clearly visible in the sky. But imagine the excitement at witnessing rocket-firing Typhoons attack a nearby airfield and destroy six or more German planes still on the ground. When firing the rockets the planes appeared to "shudder" in mid-air. Sure we were close, but it had to happen if we were going to gain victory and return home. The bombing continued and the heaviest raid took place on 5th April 1945.

6th April 1945. "Moving off" at 7.30 am we marched through the cold rain back through the town of WEIDEN to WALDTHORN. The Americans were making regular bombing raids.

10th April 1945. Eventually the German command decided to transport us by open railway trucks in a southerly direction. At 2.45 am we were marched to the railway station in WEIDEN to experience a never-forgotten train journey through REGENSBURG to a village named STRASSKIRCHEN. The train journey was slow, with the German guards ensuring that no man escaped. I clearly remember the excitement in the early evening when a solitary fighter plane flew down the railway tracks overhead and then turned back to have another look at our train. Without hesitation the train was brought to a halt and the train crew were seen desperately running into the nearby fields. We simply could not refrain from laughing at this sight, which clearly indicated what the train crews had had to contend with and they were desperately afraid.

Of course, we were "sitting ducks" in open waggons, as the fighter plane

returned to its flight. We didn't know whether the plane was American or one of the remaining few German planes – and then again, if it was an American would we be recognised or thought to be German troops? Fortunately, we did not get "straffed" by machine-guns because it was, in fact, a German fighter.

The train approached REGENSBURG just before midnight and when the train arrived at the bridge over the River ~~Rhein~~, we could see that the bombing had removed the railtrack support "sleepers" in numerous places, with gaps of two or three metres without sleepers!

DANUBE

The train literally "inched" forward over the bridge, to minimise the risk of spreading the railtrack, which would have resulted in the train crashing down hundreds of feet into the Danube below. I am sure that we were all thankful to cross the bridge safely.

It was early in the day when we passed another column of English and Anzac POW's and I recognised several chaps I knew at BLECHAMMER and KNURÓW. Later, I learnt that several of these chaps were killed in the bombing.

14th April 1945. The nearby towns of PLATTLING, LANDSHUT and STRAUBING were heavily bombed and we were in the "melting pot". Our rations were 250 grammes of Knäckebrot for three days and 430 grammes for the following four days.

17th April 1945. News reached us that a train with Red Cross parcels had been bombed in the nearby railway station.

18th April 1945. Next morning at 5 am we marched 3 km to PLATTLING railway station to witness the result of the bombing with carriages and waggons "stacked" four-high on top of each other. Our main task was to recover the Red Cross food parcels and prevent civilians pilfering. At least we were issued with one parcel each, which we welcomed.

The atmosphere was hot and I didn't like the idea of being killed by American bombing, so there remained only one thing to do – escape from the column. No one had previously succeeded in getting away and the guards had been doubled in numbers registering their inner fears.

The barn in which we were confined was very large and tall, and at one end it was partitioned and locked. It was here that the owner stored sacks of lime and cement. Climbing into the rafters of the main barn, I was able to work my way over the high partition, where I discovered that at that end of the barn the outer walls had a cavity wooden and plaster-board wall to provide extra weather protection, which measured about 14 inches apart. This provided the necessary idea.

By this time the majority of the chaps knew that I had operated the secret radio in the camp at KNUROW, so they were not too surprised even if they saw me

clambering in the roof.

23rd April 1945. I discussed my plan to escape with 'Taffy' Morgan and he readily agreed to join me. Frankly, I realised that he was tough and would have followed me anywhere. Not knowing what the future held, I thought that another opinion could prove useful, so I put the confidential idea to Tim Mahoney, who simply grinned and replied to count him in. The scheme was to operate prior to the next order to march on – but when it came, the order was that everyone had to be ready to move within half an hour.

In retrospect, I think that the upheaval caused by this hasty order helped our plan and when they lined up "in threes" to be counted by the Germans before marching off, proved another point in our favour. The Germans were accustomed to the metric system and were not good at multiplying by three, but then again if one row of three men were missing – how could anyone escape with double the number of guards?

We three – 'Taffy', Tim and I had climbed into the rafters and slipped into the cavity wooden panelling, onto a strong wooden support beam, with our heads about one foot from the top of the partition.

Would we be detected? Would the Germans realise that three POW's were concealed somewhere in the barn and spray it with bullets? We were overjoyed to hear our pals march off.

We had one bottle of water between us and two biscuits for each man, and we had no idea how long we would have to remain concealed, because we knew that as our pals quickly marched off German SS troops moved in to defend the area against the rapidly advancing 3rd American Army.

Inside the narrow partition it was naturally dusty and 'Taffy' after a couple of days developed an occasional cough, which he did his utmost to stifle, but it was worrying!

During the action, part of the roof of the barn was destroyed and later we learnt that several American tanks had been put out of action at a T-junction fairly close to the barn.

Our daily water ration was a spoonful of water for each man – so perhaps you can imagine the torture of hearing it raining during two of the nights we were in hiding.

It was quite an ordeal – trying to detach oneself from reality – it was like dying in a coffin to remain alive!

29th April 1945. It was difficult to picture how the battle was progressing after so many days and nights.

To me, it sounded as though the American forces were spearheading to the

south of our position and after a lot of tank and vehicle noise, it was quiet! A cockerel broke the eerie silence.

Perhaps about two hours later, we heard vehicle movement and a loud voice conveying orders – was it German or American? Although we could not make out the words, I whispered to 'Taffy' and Tim – my theory was that the Germans had been compelled to withdraw for fear of being cut off from the south, also the order had been given in a high-pitched voice and not a deep guttural German voice! Had the Yanks arrived?

I persuaded the others that we should take a chance and hope that it was the Americans.

When we eventually climbed out of our "hide-out", we collapsed with fatigue on the sacks of lime and laughed and laughed! Dusty, dirty, with a week's growth of beard – we could not believe what we were seeing!

We had survived the ordeal of being concealed for six days and nights in a narrow cavity wall, measuring 14 inches wide and during that time we each had only two biscuits to eat and a daily drop of water to wet our lips.

"Let us get out of this" I said. Tim replied "Let us go quietly". "Not likely!", I retorted.

We struggled out of the barn – excited, half crazy and loudly laughing. Immediately around the corner of the barn, we faced two sten-guns trained on us and two wide-mouthed Americans disbelieving what they had encountered. "Who are you guys and where have you come from?"

When we related our story they invited us to take their guns and shoot a few Germans in revenge, and even suggested we raped an English-speaking young German girl who lived nearby. I quickly told them that our only wish was to strip off completely and wash under the hand water pump situated in a yard nearby.

First, they escorted us to meet their officer, who was riding in a jeep. He detailed a couple of his men to look after us and informed us that a meal was being served near the railway station within an hour's time.

When we joined the Yanks of "C" Battery 204 Howitzer Regiment 3rd American Army for the meal, the news had quickly circulated and they gave us a wonderful reception – with their cameras clicking incessantly. The first man that I saw carrying his mess-tin and slices of WHITE bread nearly made my eyes pop out of my head. It was so obvious that I apologised to him and explained that I had not seen similar white bread for nearly five years.

That evening we bedded-down with the Yanks in the railway station, but during the night they received orders to advance again – which they did without a single moan. Their one aim was to finish the war and return home.

30th April 1945. We were liberated and still alive!

The next day, we assisted the Yanks who were guarding the Germans captured – and being transported back from the front to a civilian prison at STRAUBING.

En-route the word passed around that a 4 Star General was in the war-zone and sure enough, 8-10 miles later we passed General 'Blood and Guts' Patton, sitting proudly in his jeep, travelling to the front we had left behind.

At Straubing Prison we helped to search the German prisoners for their arms and had the satisfaction of hearing, in the next room, an American Senior Officer verbally slaying a German General about the sins committed by the Germans.

1st May 1945. The following day we continued escorting the American trucks which transported the captured Germans back to the outskirts of NUREMBERG. The prisoner of war "pen" held over 300,000 prisoners and stretched as far as the eye could see. The "Yanks" were really hoping that the "Krauts" would try to make an escape attempt, to provide an excuse to shoot some of them.

Travelling on the American trucks westward along badly damaged roads, with numerous shell-holes, we were passed by another American Army convoy – with "Black personnel" travelling in the opposite direction. I really could not believe my ears at the shouted abuse when they passed each other – one would have thought that the "Black convoy" were the enemy!! It transpired that the previous day a "Black lorry" had forced a "White lorry" off the road – hence the abuse!!

That evening we slept in a large youth home, close to the "POW pen", along with the Yanks, who decided to have a party. What an experience! They were crazy – nearly everyone talking in their mother-tongue, including German, in fact every language except English! They were wildly firing their pistols into the ceiling with lack of self-control, so we decided to find a quiet corner!

2nd May 1945. My brief notes state that we travelled to BAD KREUZENACH where we stayed in a private house near the Military Barracks there. During the day, I was officially interrogated by 2nd Lt Donald Sherwood, an Intelligence Officer with the Third US Army, and given papers identifying that I was a British soldier who had escaped from captivity. This was the second time that I was questioned, because naturally, when we first made contact with the Yanks, they were keen to learn what German forces were ahead of them.

3rd May 1945. Everywhere was in a turmoil, with devastation and ruins for miles and miles!

Our one intention was to get back home to England somehow. We went to the railway station and learnt that a train packed with Belgian troops were probably travelling back to Belgium – so we decided to join them. For hours and hours we travelled through the SAARBRÜCKEN, and witnessed the result of continuous

bombing by the Allies for years. That night we slept on the train, which slowly travelled on to LUXEMBOURG.

4th May 1945. In LUXEMBOURG, at the Red Cross Centre, we were well received and were thoroughly "deloused" and issued with new uniforms. That night we slept at the centre and received instructions to proceed to NAMUR and then on to BRUSSELS.

I believe it was here that we saw about fifty Jews – clad in striped clothing, running excitedly through the streets. They had undoubtedly been recently released from a concentration camp. Can you imagine their happiness at being free again – and alive! Well we felt exactly the same!

5th May 1945. We travelled by train to NAMUR and stayed overnight in the Military Barracks under the command of the American troops.

6th May 1945. This was a wonderful, wonderful day!!!

Breakfast and lunch (how civilised) in NAMUR.

Tea in BRUSSELS and supper in ENGLAND.

In BRUSSELS we were taken to the airfield with special nursing care and attention, and climbed into the body of a Lancaster bomber, where we sat on the floor near the machine-gun racks. Everyone seemed to share our relief and happiness to be flying home to ENGLAND.

We landed safely near GATWICK and spent the night in a Nissen hut, but not before strolling FREE men down the country lane to a nearby pub. (Reminds me that we did not have any money – but we could only have drunk half a pint!)

The English countryside is beautiful, especially during the month of May – but I had not fully appreciated just how beautiful! The trees and hedgerows in blossom – and green fields. I will always treasure the thoughts of my returning safely home at this time of year.

We were given telegram forms to enable us to write and inform our next-of-kin that we had arrived safely back in England, and to expect us home within the next few days.

7th May 1945. Travelling in a 8 cwt truck, we were taken to a large military camp at Horsham where records were kept. We were "kitted out", received a Travel Warrant, some pay, leave pass etc etc.

We were really going home!!

8th May 1945. The train seemed a long time arriving at the station – but when eventually it arrived, it appeared to be speeding along – remember that for years I had not travelled in either a fast train or car! Even 30 mph seemed fast!

Finally, my train approached AYLESBURY Railway Station, but for some reason

did not pull into the platform, and I could see my home across the field. Growing impatient, I could not wait another minute, I opened the carriage door, threw my kit-bag down on the line and clambered after it.

Being physically weak, I struggled to carry my kit-bag to the left luggage room, where I left it, knowing full-well that my father would be pleased to collect it later.

Didn't the railway station look small?

I strolled along over the railway bridge to be greeted by Mr Elliott (an old friend's uncle) who walked along beside me. He said how pleased he was to see me home again and we chatted together.

When we approached my home, I said "Cheerio" to him, and he replied "I don't think that you live here, it's further down the street".

With a smile, I answered "Well, I've been away a long time but I haven't forgotten where I live".

I found it difficult to hold back the tears when my mother met me on the garden path. My father and I were great pals.

In later life one recognises the sacrifices parents make, and their constant fears, when their sons and daughters go off to war!