

MAY 2018 EDITION OF THE RAMC REUNITED NEWSLETTER

THE LATE COLONEL BERT TENNUCI –
20th MARCH 1922 TO 30TH NOVEMBER 1983



Colonel Bert Tennuci taken shortly before he retired in 1977.

Copyright: Rob Tennuci.

Colonel Bert Tennuci was a very soldierly figure, honourable, a gentleman and very much admired by those who knew him. **He is a Corps Legend.** I had the pleasure of knowing him from a young age. His eldest son Brian and I used to play alongside one another in the 1950's when our father's served at Depot & Training Establishment RAMC, Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Crookham.

It would appear to be a tradition within the RAMC that if your father served or had served in the RAMC, the son would follow in their father's footsteps. Like many a young lad before me: Terry Reeves and his brothers before him, Tony Clarke, Roger Chissell, Brian Tennuci, Mac McHale, my brother Lawrence "Minnie" and my late brother John, Bobby Smith, Derek Proudfoot and the James brothers just to name a few. When I became of age I enlisted into the Corps on 3rd September 1963.

Many years passed and I had become an established player in the RAMC/RADC Corps Football Team. Colonel Bert was the Chairman of the Corps Team. The Corps side were playing a fixture against the RAOC and the venue I recall was a Central Ammunition Depot and was a couple of hours drive by coach to the location, which escapes me. I was sat next to the Colonel on part of the journey. During the conversation he asked me if I knew the Corps song and told him that I didn't. He told me that when the Depot played in the Army Cup Final in 1949 at Aldershot the Depot marched by Companies from Crookham along the Twesledown Racecourse Road to Aldershot and each Company sang the song all the way to the Military Stadium in Aldershot. (Having spoken to Derek Waterhouse he stated that the songs title is "Coreabella Coreabella" and he even remembers the words to the song at the ripe old age of 88) By the time the team had returned to Aldershot we were all familiar with the Corps song. Those who were there that day can be seen huddled together singing the Corps song. Look out for us at the next RAMC Reunited Reunion in 2020 in Buxton.

On the subject of football the Colonel had a lifetime commitment to football. He was a highly skilled player and played regularly between 1948 and 1954 for the Army and Corps as well as for Hampshire. During the 1948/49 season he skippered the Depot & Training Establishment RAMC which won the Army Cup 6-0. On retiring from football he became a referee and set up a unique record of being the only individual to be a holder of an Army Cup Final winner's medal, run the line in the Army Cup Final in 1960 and, refereed the 1965 Army Challenge Cup Final. This achievement has not been repeated by any other member of the Army and is another bit of history appertaining to this great man.

The following link <https://youtu.be/VIL-5d0YjH0> shows action of the 1949 Army Cup Final which was covered by 'The Pathe News' and towards the end of the video shows the skipper Bert Tennuci collecting the Army Cup.



**DEPOT & TRAINING ESTABLISHMENT RAMC ARMY CUP WINNERS 1948/49
FOOTBALL SEASON**

In addition to the Army Cup the team also won the Aldershot District Cup, Southern Command Cup, Aldershot Charity Cup and Aldershot District Senior League Cup, all on display in the photo.

I am unable to put names to faces of the Depot & Training Establishment RAMC team which consisted of:

Jack; Barber; Macey; Stokoe; Tennuci (Capt); Langley; Callan; Caswell; Jackson; Lockey and Richardson.

There are only three people that I can identify in the picture; Bob Stokoe (stood next to the Depot RSM WOI (RSM) Lofty Bryson who was with Bert at Arnhem) played for Newcastle United; Bert Tennuci and Captain Howell sat next to Bert on his left.

I would like to thank Brian, Robert and Alan for granting me permission to publish the transcripts of their father's Diary entries from September 1944 until April 1945. I am privileged to be able to share with you the following and feel that it should be published in its entirety as opposed to serialising it over a couple of editions.

SERGEANT VICTOR ALBERT TENNUCI

Unit : 16 Parachute Field Ambulance.

Army No: 7263099

The following is Albert Victor "Bert" Tennuci's complete account of his experiences before, during and after Operation Market Garden, from September 1944 to April 1945. This is copyright of the family and may not be reproduced in any form without their permission.

INTRODUCTION

Albert 'Bert' Tennuci was born of a service family on 20 March 1922. His father was a Sergeant Major in the 5th Dragoon Guards, which were then serving in Palestine. As the family travelled in several other postings, it was not until 1930 that the young Bert Tennuci first set foot in England. He joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1936 as a Boy soldier and reached the age criteria for adult service just 17 days before the outbreak of the Second World War.

After various postings, by May 1943 Bert was a Nursing Orderly with 84th General Hospital RAMC stationed in North Africa. Looking for some excitement, he volunteered for parachuting and successfully passed, transferring to 16th Parachute Field Ambulance (PFA) RAMC, just in time for the Sicily operation. After service in Italy, he returned to the UK in late 1943, where 1st Airborne Division began their training for the invasion of North West Europe. After several cancelled operations, Bert and the rest of 16 PFA went to Holland in September 1944 on Operation Market Garden, bound for Arnhem.

The Battle plan intended that 16 Para Field Ambulance would move with the 2nd Parachute Battalion, snake to the outskirts of Arnhem, where they would leave to go

to the St Elizabeth's Hospital and set up a Main Dressing Station there. Unlike much of the rest of the 1st Airborne plans, this is precisely what happened. By about 2100hrs on 17th September 1944, 16 PFA had arrived and Sergeant Tennuci was NCO in charge of wards. As time progressed, German forces occupied the hospital area eventually and marched most of the unit away into captivity. A few selected personnel were allowed to remain behind: Bert Tennuci being one of them.

Later, Bert was sent to the 'Airborne Hospital' established at Apeldoorn and later became a Prisoner of War. Bert was finally liberated, and after a perilous journey through Poland and Russia, returned to the UK via the Russian port of Odessa, in April 1945.

After the war, Bert remained in the Army and achieved the post of Regimental Sergeant Major of the RAMC Depot in 1952. He was commissioned in 1956, and retired in 1977 having risen to the rank of Colonel, his last posting being Commandant of Defence Medical Equipment Depot (DMED) Ludgershall. On his retirement he became Curator of the Medical Services Museum from 1977 till he died suddenly at work in November 1983.

TRANSCRIPT OF BERT TENNUCI'S DIARY SEPTEMBER 1944 – APRIL 1945

I was last in a line of men who tumbled out of the aircraft door that day into the sky above enemy held Holland. Within seconds of jumping, I was holding myself ready for the thud of landing that would start me on the biggest parachute operation of the War - and the greatest adventure of my life. It was the battle of Arnhem.

For nine long months we had prepared our Field Ambulances for just such a day as this. At a little place called Culverthorpe near Sleaford, Lincolnshire, until the late summer of 1944. At this point in time the Allied invasion of Western Europe was well under way. In the thrust for Germany, it became vital that the Allies should find the Rhine bridges at Arnhem intact and, on 15th September the 1st Airborne Division were told that they had been picked to capture the bridges and hold them until the advancing armies could cross. We were confident. Morale was high and when we were told that the job would last, at most 48 hrs, some of the lads tied a soccer ball each on their backs, hoping for a game when it was all over. In fact, it was part of my equipment.

There was a general air of expectancy when the Field Ambulance was briefed and the sections dispatched to their appropriate battalions. The equipment was checked and the containers loaded. This time there was no last minute cancellation, as there had been so many times before.

At 08.30 on the morning of September 17th we paraded in full kit, carrying our parachutes. A further check later in the morning and at midday we took off.



The two surgical teams of 16 Parachute Field Ambulance at Culverthorpe Hall, taken shortly before Arnhem. On the back row, 5th, 9th and 10th from the left respectively are Private Frank Mumford, Major Cedric Longland and Sergeant Albert Victor Tennuci. On the front row, 1st and 3rd from the left respectively are Private John Butcher and Captain Alexander Lipmann-Kessel

Twenty of us sat in the Dakota. One officer would jump first and I would bring up the rear. I remember the dispatcher, one of the American crew and a "boozing pal" of mine, who was unhappy about dropping us in daylight but there below us in the Channel we could see the Air-Sea Rescue Service churning up the foam and above, Fighter Command was supplying a welcome umbrella.

We headed straight out from Hastings to the flooded coast of Holland to receive a burst of ack-ack fire in greeting. It seemed a long time until the crew chief told us 'ten minutes to go'. And we were all busily watching the ack-ack bursts, so it came as a surprise when the red light flashed on. That gave us four minutes before the jump.

The minutes slipped by, and when the green light did go on the twenty men literally poured out of the aircraft, one immediately behind the other. It was faster than I'd ever seen them do it before. The only things I remember about that jump were the sight of the canopy developing and then seeing a cluster of bushes coming up to meet me before that exalted feeling of touching down again.

The Germans had sniped at us during the drop but the Air Landing Brigade and Reconnaissance Corps, who had preceded us into the dropping zone, were quickly clearing the Germans out. As a result we were able to make our way with comparative ease to our pre-arranged rendezvous.

One of our battalions had been assigned to march into Arnhem. They met with little effective resistance as they pressed on. The Dutch were glad to see us and readily

gave us drinks and fruit. I noticed they were also quick to pick up our discarded silk parachutes too!



Sergeant Jim Travis (left) of the 21st Independent Parachute Company, accepts a drink from Dutch civilians off DZ-X. The picture was taken shortly after the 1st Parachute Brigade had jumped over the zone. Travis has his arm in plaster and is wearing a sling. He had broken a bone in his wrist shortly before Market Garden, but had insisted on accompanying his No.1 Platoon into action to carry out his duties, which he performed admirably. Standing just to the right of him, wearing a helmet, is Sergeant Bert Tennuci of the 16th Parachute Field Ambulance.

Our section rested at the edge of some woods outside Arnhem, a small clean town built among shallow hills at the side of a flat plain.

It was about 4pm when we began to move along the road which the battalion had cleared. We pulled our equipment (complete except for some dental appliances) on small trollies. We did not have to pull for long for the battalion sent us back six prisoners, whom we detailed for pulling the trolleys under the muzzle of a sten gun. All along the road we continued to receive gifts of fruit and beer from the civilians and it was not until a kilometre outside the town that we were slowed down, as the troops ahead met with stiffer resistance.

Constant small arms fire chattered away for the next four hours before we reached our objective, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The bridge, so often mentioned in briefings, was about a half a mile from the hospital. Soon after we arrived we received a message that the bridge had been taken but that our lads were meeting with terrific resistance and were fighting grimly to hold it.

The Dutch medical authorities at the Hospital were most cooperative and they quickly allotted us an operating theatre and wards, so that within a half hour we were functioning as a hospital - and we had plenty to do. Heavy mortaring and machine gunning was going on around us the whole time and we could see from the wounded coming in that although the Germans had been pushed off the bridge, they had by no means given it up.

We formed into shifts and I decided to stay up all night though the hospital stairs soon had my legs aching as I hurried up and down to our post-operative ward. There was no let-up in the mortaring throughout the night and in the early hours of the morning, the tumult increased. The Germans fired on the hospital by accident and some of our battalion supporting the bridge were fighting hard on the perimeter of the hospital.

These men were hard pressed and two who had been pinned against a wall had no option but to pass through the hospital with their arms, followed closely by a number of Germans. A short while later there was a terrific bang in the hospital compound. Our two friends - one of them, a dare-devil named Jack Rennie - had attacked about thirty Germans with hand grenades, taking a heavy toll. Rennie had always been noted for his mad escapades and their action had shown grit, as it had been their only possible means of escape. However, it brought its consequences on us.

The attack caused a crisis for our unit. A German SS Lieutenant came in and marched the Commanding Officer, Second in Command, RSM and Quartermaster and a full section of twenty men under an officer off to the German lines in reprisal. Outside the situation grew worse. The men holding the bridge were cut off from the supporting brigade, which had been forced to withdraw to the roadway a hundred yards south. We in the hospital were virtually in German hands.

The operating teams plus six men and myself on the wards were all that remained of our unit to look after more than a hundred casualties. Of the wounded, only two had died. Major Longland was now CO and I was the senior NCO, responsible for the administering penicillin. A new drug to us at that time. The Dutch nurses helped all they could and we managed to reorganize ourselves. However, all the time the Germans were fighting uncomfortably close to the hospital. Their dead revealed the lethal accuracy of our 1st Battalion's shooting. Most had died through shots to the forehead. 'Jerry' was bringing in his casualties from the street and taking them down to the morgue but this was soon full.

I had never seen such a spectacle of massacre. Our lads had been well trained in the bombed streets of Hull for exactly this sort of street fighting and they were now proving their worth. There was a steady incoming stream of German casualties but few of them were wounded. British shooting had been too accurate.

This fighting continued well past the 48hrs which we had expected the engagement to last and the enemy brought up Tiger tanks of the 9th SS Panzer Division against our lightly armed brigades. It was on D+3 that the Germans brought into action near us their 88mm self-propelled guns and six barrelled mortars. Towards that evening our troops were forced to withdraw towards Oosterbeck, about 8 kms from Arnhem.

All through the day we had been visited by high ranking German officers, though they caused no trouble. Our ration packs however, had been removed and we relied solely on the Dutch for food. Their nurses and doctors worked tirelessly and we were also assisted by German nuns. They gave assistance where they could, irrespective of the patient's uniform. The Dutch, however, warned us not to trust them.

The Polish Parachute Brigade came in on D+3 against a murderous barrage by the Germans. Many of our planes were shot down in flames and we were full of admiration for the British and American flyers who brought their Dakotas and Sterlings in at five and six hundred feet. But as the fighting raged outside, we had further trouble at the hospital. One wing of the building was heavily mortared by the Germans and a warning from a sergeant in the 2nd Battalion, who was lying wounded, saved me from death or injury by flying splinters. One of our orderlies was hit and we had to move the casualties out into the corridors. Some of the men already wounded were hit again as they lay in bed. The loss of help from the injured orderly made things much worse. We were already working up to twenty hours a day tending to casualties.

Penicillin undoubtedly save the lives of a number of men hit in the abdomen who had been left lying for days in houses because of the difficulties of casualty collecting in the street fighting that was going on. We were given wonderful help though by Dutch college students who organized themselves into stretcher parties to comb the streets looking for wounded.

D+4 and the weight of the Panzers had had their effect. Our men were driven back by heavy guns and tanks towards Oosterbeck and all day long German heavy guns, tanks, men and machine guns were being moved up. We could see that an attack was mounting, either that night or the following day. It was then that a German Medical Services Colonel visited us and warned us to prepare for 500 British casualties in the next few days. He said the Airborne Division would be wiped out by the following night. Even then our spirits were high. We believed firmly that relief would arrive in time from the British 2nd Army. A short time later we were saddened to hear from one of the men that Colonel Frost and 30 men, all of whom were wounded, had had to give up the bridge. The rest of the Battalion were dead. Under orders to hold the bridge for 48hrs, the Battalion had hung on grimly for four days. Dakotas and Sterlings still flew in, dropping supplies. It was all over. The supplies fell uselessly into enemy lines.

We now had 150 casualties and we asked the German Colonel for plasma. He was brusque. We received nothing - nothing save the news that we would be 'annihilated' within 24 hours. On the morning of D+5 we had different treatment when Major Longland and myself left the hospital and travelled along the Oosterbeck Road towards a German headquarters. We were accompanied by a German Major and his driver. When we arrived we were greeted with champagne. We saw two medical orderlies of the 3rd Battalion there tending British wounded. After the meeting we moved on to Oosterbeck crossroads, where our men were holding the line. At the crossroads we found "Hotel 100" and "Hotel 400" - on opposite sides of the street, the centre of bitter fighting. We took the names of wounded and borrowed a jeep to move on under mortar fire to the British Divisional Headquarters where we wanted to reach the hospital but the systematic mortaring forced us into a house held by our

troops. We were just getting into the building when a mortar bomb exploded less than ten yards away, injuring the German driver, who had come with us under truce. The explosion left us all deafened. Our officer decided it was impossible to continue under the heavy fire and we had to return to "Hotel 400", where we learned that three more of the men of the Field Ambulance had been killed across the road.

A truce was declared for the evacuation of casualties. Both hotels were full of wounded and the Germans helped load the seriously injured onto Lorries, laying them on straw. They were then taken back to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, in Arnhem. By evening we had 300 British casualties. We had the help of seven more orderlies but had still the need of more aid. Men from the 133 Parachute Field Ambulance, who were attached to the 4th Parachute Brigade, came to work in the hospital with us.

That evening we could see from the top of the hospital, the British artillery barrage from Nijmegen. The sky was red with the glow of fires started by shellfire and from houses which the Germans had set alight surrounding the bridge. The whole scene was one of destruction. Only the Rhine retained its serenity, resembling a pool, as still as ice under the colour of spotlights in some stage setting.

The Germans opened up an emergency hospital near Apeldoorn for British casualties and many of our walking wounded were being sent on there from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, after we had given them a meal. We managed to confuse Jerry by consistently giving altered figures for our wounded and in the end, the Germans had to go around and make a count themselves. His figures were still wrong. We had men in bed as 'Dutch Civilians', men hidden and men out in the corridors; so that no amount of Prussian mathematics and attention to detail could give our enemies the right answer. This way, we were able to get men who were fit on the move through the Dutch underground movement.

A German Sergeant Major told us we would have to evacuate the hospital completely but the American Mitchell bomber and the British artillery on the other side put a stop to that plan. We never saw the Sergeant Major after a taste of the bombing. However, it could not last forever, this game of playing with figures and on the morning of 26th September, we were ordered to evacuate, leaving only thirty seriously wounded, one surgeon and eight men.

They moved us out to Apeldoorn, out of the hospital into the former barracks of the Queen of Holland's Horse Guards. There we found two blocks being used as wards by some of our colleagues from the two hotels at Oosterbeck crossroads. With one medical officer I was given the task of organizing what was called Block 'C'. This block that was to serve for our wounded, had once been a stables - filthy and unventilated. We cleared it out and procured wooden beds with straw paillasses. It took us a day to get organised.

Our guards were young arrogant, SS men. They held us up as we tried to prepare meals and carry out urgent jobs, fanatically awaiting orders on details from their NCO's. Our privileges as protected personnel under the Geneva Convention were completely ignored, as were the needs of the sick men we tended.

By the morning of September 27th, there were about 2000 of us at the barracks. We were given two mobile kitchens. One was operating for the needs of only 50 Germans. After some persuasion, our Commanding Officer managed to obtain this for our use. A staff Sergeant from our own Field Ambulance was appointed quartermaster and chief chef. Captured though we were, our men had by no means given up the fight and this 'character' of ours in charge of the kitchen brazenly hung a sign "RTO's" [*Regimental Transport Officer*] on his door - an open invitation to any of the lads who needed food to make an escape. Twelve of them made a breakaway that night. Most of the lads were recaptured but the attempts continued and gradually became more successful as our people made contact with the Underground and received help in getting into hiding.

Above us each day, we saw flight after flight of bombers going towards Germany and we could hear distant, spasmodic machine gunning. On the second day of October, we heard terrific explosions coming from Arnhem as our bombers attacked. Later on we heard that the Bridge had been demolished. Typhoon fighter bombers followed up with an attack on ground emplacements and we could hear the rockets screeching for their targets.

Our main source of information at this time was from patients whom the Dutch took to Apeldoorn for X-ray treatment. Much of it was conflicting and rumours followed one another through the camp. The Dutch Red Cross were doing a fine job smuggling in comforts and cigarettes by hiding these under splinters on the sound arms and legs of our men coming into the wards.

We sifted from the rumours that Gerry had ordered thousands of Dutch to help in the digging of defences. When they refused, forty Dutch had been shot. Among other facts that we gleaned was the generally believed tale that a bridgehead had been formed at Arnhem.

All the time, men continued to break out, despite the Alsatian watch dogs which the Germans used. Our men did it in a ten minute interval in the changeover of the guard, most of them escaping under cover of darkness. Gerry did not know that the way to escape was through the back door of the cookhouse and the dogs were a wasted asset on the inside of the wall, where they patrolled. The weather, luckily, was good for the escaping, with fine warm days, though we felt cold at night.

The food improved later in our stay at Apeldoorn and it is worth recording that few of the patients died. We were receiving Dutch invalid parcels through official channels and we were beginning to settle in there a little better. However, night workers had little sleep in the daytime. The roar of bombing missions kept us wide awake.

As we watched through the day the turning of the first autumn leaves, some of us began to realise that the chances of relief from the Second Army were dwindling. We began to feel that our hopes of escape were fading too and that we were doomed to be 'cage birds' for some while.

This feeling was confirmed in the second week of the month when the Germans told our senior Medical Officer that a Red Cross Train would be taking most of our patients into Germany. We sorted out those fit to travel and the appropriate number

of orderlies were chosen to go with them. That night we prayed that the Typhoons would blow up the railway but that they would miss us in doing it. The next day the Typhoons zoomed in strafing and rocketing the line but by early afternoon we learned that it was still usable. For five hundred of us that was the signal that started our journey into the 'fatherland' in the Red Cross train.

The German Red Cross workers were amenable and we received an issue of cigarettes. The shunting of the train mingled with the sound of gunfire from Arnhem, where the Typhoons were again on the attack. It was not until we had gone some way that we saw that the Germans had placed a heavy ack ack train about fifty yards from our Red Cross train and it had been in action against our planes. Our CO lodged a complaint and the armed train was moved up the line.

In the early evening we stopped near Apeldoorn, where a bridge had been bombed. Here, the Dutch began to pass through cigarettes and food to our wounded on the train but the guards quickly stopped that. All the time we were drawing closer to the frontier. When the train eventually pulled out of Apeldoorn, we caught our first glimpse of Germany.

Escape? Could we get away before we crossed the border? That was what a sergeant and I had been discussing but it was our ill luck to be in the same compartment as the train guards. They appeared a low mentality types and we considered our chances of jumping for it. We decided to try. I was to get to the door, pull it open and leap out to be followed closely by the sergeant. I reached the door, pushed through and made my jump. However, of all things, the train pulled to a stop just outside a station. I tried to hide what I had been doing, by unhurriedly retracing my steps. This did not work and one of the guards, a Luftwaffe man, spotted my movements and gave the orders for all doors to be locked. That was it. We knew now it was first stop - Germany.

Two on the train had better luck though. A padre and a doctor escaped during the night. We hoped that they made good their breakaway.

We entered Germany on 10th October. The first large town through which we passed was the badly bombed Osnabruck, where we received a hostile reception from the townspeople. The town was wrecked and when we pulled into the shattered station we were met by a crowd shouting 'Schweinhund Engländer'. Fists were shaken and some people even tried to board the train when they heard that we were the 'cut-throats' who had parachuted into Arnhem.

Our treatment on the train remained good. The food was reasonable and the Germans still issued us with cigarettes every day. One day, one of the guards admitted to us in confidence that, far from being a Nazi, he had been born in Knightsbridge, London of German parents who had left England when he was 12 years old. He seemed proud of his English birth, and a typical anti-Nazi German. His parents were dead. They had been killed by our bombers two months earlier during bombing raid on Brunswick.

We travelled on past Hanover to a small station called Fallingbostel, where we detrained and were marched four kilometres to our new 'home'. One or two Britons

already there welcomed us and told us we were about to become members of Stalag XIB. This was an international camp containing political as well as military prisoners. We were herded together and a German officer interrogated us, asking medical personnel about the use of penicillin by the British. A bottle of John Haig whisky stood on the table to help anyone who wanted to loosen his tongue. The interrogator also had packets of Players cigarettes as a further inducement to 'co-operation'. He wanted to know about the British 17 pounder gun in Churchill tanks and about the effects of the V-1 bomb and about how the rationing system worked in England.

We were photographed, fingerprinted and marched off into a compound where there were already airborne troops who had been there two days. They told us that two of our officers had been shot, one of them in an attempted escape from a train. He had been a captain in our unit.

We looked about. They had herded four hundred of us into a bungalow about twice the size of an army Nissen hut. There were about a hundred paillasses between the lot of us and even these were bug ridden. It was a case of first come, first served for these beds. Next day, the four hundred of us discovered that we had one tap between us for washing and again it was the early bird, as it were, had the wash. None of us then was sorry to get up and there was a scurry for the door, where we breathed deeply, savouring fresh air once more.

On 12th October, the following day we received Red Cross food parcels, one between two men. Also, some letter cards were issued. Morale became harder after this as we began to realise our plight. For exercise, we marched frequently around the compound between three of the bungalows, all going in the same direction. There was brighter news for the RAMC men, who heard that some were to be picked out for work in the camp hospital looking after British wounded. A rumour went round that some of us were to help in German hospitals to relieve pressure on their staff but this did not receive much credence.

Bad as it was, we settled into the new camp as best we could. I tried to brighten things up a bit by playing my harmonica and an American with us sang spirituals, which went down well.

It became necessary for us to ask for spades to dig trench latrines after a while. The Germans did not offer them and left us entirely to our own means. When we asked for disinfectant, the answer was definitely 'no'. However, no matter what the privations, British humour still revealed itself. Some of the lads wounded 'below the belt' had no trousers and had travelled into Germany in their shirts, each with a blanket round his waist. Those of us who had kept our pants saw the funny side of it, even if the others didn't!

I spoke to one of the paratroopers who had been brought into the camp before us. He told us of an incident in which one of his comrades had been standing in a doorway when the aircraft siren sounded. The man had been ignorant of the German rule that no prisoner was to stand in a doorway or in the compound at such a time. Before he could make out what shouting Germans were telling him, he was shot. The guard responsible had later been removed from his post. The rest of the guards had been ordered to stay outside the wire. Inside the wire only one German guard

stayed on duty. An elderly man he was a non-Nazi and had been at the camp in 1918 when the British Military Police came to release our prisoners of war. He was like many of the older soldiers of the German Army whom we met. He talked a good deal of the events that had taken place at the camp such as the typhus epidemic which had swept the Russian compound in 1942, claiming 8,400 victims. He told us of how 4000 of these had been deliberately shot to prevent the epidemic spreading to the British and French compounds of the international camp. The story was confirmed by the British prisoners who had been there for years. Some of the men who had been kept in the camp for some years said they were not too badly off compared with others. They maintained that the British powers in the camp kept our people regarded as the 'no.1 prisoners'.

Opposite us in their own compound, we could see the Russians. If our treatment was bad, theirs was far worse. They were shown no sympathy or consideration. They were much worse off than us for accommodation.

The food remained bad but on 18th October we received bulk Red Cross food in place of Red Cross parcels. This food had come from the Argentine, through Geneva. The main issue of soup was made from the leaves and stalks of sugar beet and the best soup was ladled out on Sundays. That was pea soup - a treat. Until we adopted a 'German palate' and used to their harsh ersatz bread, many of our lads were ill. They gave us a 1½ lb loaf between six to last a day. The remainder of our rations consisted of a small pat of margarine and a teaspoonful of sugar. Three or four times a week we received potatoes boiled in their jackets. The ersatz jam we had was manufactured from wood pulp! Occasionally, greatly as a novelty we received tinned fish.

One sound that did set the pulse racing and boosted morale 100% was the skirl of bagpipes which came across the fields each morning. The pipes were played by lads of the 51st Highland Division, who had been captured in France in 1940 and who were billeted with the RAF at a camp two miles away. We were growing weaker with the bad fare and poor conditions. Fewer men took exercise round the compound. Most of the time we lay down and read. There was some lighter relief when the Germans asked for volunteers for the Free British Corps. That meant just traitors to us but the pamphlets they issued came in handy. We had been short of toilet paper for weeks. Unfortunately the German Commandant who visited us to find out our reaction to his appeal discovered what had happened to his pamphlets, despite the 'nil return' he had received. He ordered extra parades every two hours for roll call.

I remember the pamphlet had promised that we would be taken to Berlin where we would enjoy the same privileges as German officers. Meals in hotels, German frauleins supplied and, in one very special paragraph, it stated that we would be expected to fight on the Russian front and not against the western allies.

The 20th October brought us a visit from the Church of England Padre [*Gedge*] who had been taken prisoner in 1940. He told us how the RAF had recently bombed an ammunition train near Hanover but unfortunately a passenger train had been passing at the same time and 400 people were feared killed and many hundreds wounded.

Outside the rain poured down and every movement out of doors took us through inches of mud. Some of the infantry privates were detailed for working parties but many of the lads had sewn stripes on their tunics to elude Gerry's press gang. Too bad for the lance corporals however, for the Germans did not consider that one stripe was a rank and they had to work with the rest. They received extra clothing, clogs and given more food on these jobs. When some of the men were moved out to make up one of these working parties, a friend and I managed to procure a bed. It was wooden but we had a paillasse and were fairly comfortable.

On Sunday, 22nd October we cleared our consciences and attended a service conducted by our own padre in the French compound. We noticed men there of all nationalities, even though the service was in English. I noted too at that time that the French were lucky enough to have a cinema.

It was on our way back from church that we first heard the rumour that all Warrant Officers and NCO's were to be moved to a new camp near Breslau. The Germans confirmed this after tea when they told us to be ready to move off first thing in the morning. That evening we hid those articles which we had smuggled into the camp by concealing them in special pockets in our airborne smocks or in battledress blouses, for we were sure they would search us.

Soon after dawn on the following day *[23rd October]* everyone was up and about and curiously enough, happy about the move. We all wanted to get away from the conditions which we then endured and each man hoped for something better at the next camp. The journey began when the gates of our compound swung open and four hundred of us marched out into the French compound for the inevitable search. Gerry found my glider pilot rucksack, which I had managed to get into the camp but the searchers missed my compass, German belt and other items of escape kit which had been issued to us before Arnhem. A four kilometre march brought us to the railway station where we were herded into trucks, forty men to a wagon. Inside we found no stove and no adequate means of ventilation. As a precaution against the escape of the last journey, the Germans removed our boots, belts and braces, placing them in a separate truck. Finally they locked us in. We were issued with a loaf of bread and a tin of corned beef to last two men for three days. Fortunately, we had kept back some of the Red Cross food issued at the camp and this helped us out. We pulled out of Fallingbostal soon after lunchtime.

On the afternoon of 24th October we pulled up on the outskirts of a city where an air raid was in progress. It was Berlin. All along the line, the railway track had been blown up by bombing. Hundreds of Russians, men and women were busily carrying out repair work under guard. We saw German civilians too and felt better for it. Gone was the once universal arrogance. They looked morbid and worried. It boosted our morale to see them. Berlin as we saw it from the train was in a terrible state, with factories no more than gigantic piles of rubble. Along all the roads was evidence of Allied bombing. Here and there a factory was still at work and occasionally we saw a whole street intact but these were exceptions. Berlin had taken a terrible hammering and the whole city appeared severely mauled.

Even for October the weather was still warm and we were glad of the one mess can of water which we received per man each day. Frankfurt an der Oder, which we

reached in the evening, the German Red Cross gave us some very salty pea soup which made us almost mad with thirst. They did let us have more water in the end though when we stopped at the next station. Here we saw the now familiar rubble and signs of destruction. Again we had to watch the fists of angry German shaken at us. We merely laughed back at them. Habitually, the men retired early to their straw beds so that they could chalk up another day of their journey. Another day nearer victory.

We arrived at our destination, a place called Sagan [*Zagan, Poland*] at 7.30am on 25th October. The town is about 95 miles north of Breslau. We detrained, marched through some woods past Stalag Luft III, the noted camp for RAF POWs, where 48 of them had been shot. As we approached the gates, we wondered if we too, as airborne personnel would be taken in there but the Germans kept us marching. We felt a sense of relief when we left the place behind and came to Stalag VIIIIC, our home for months to come. Lightly, they searched us then allotted us to various bungalows, about 175 men to each. We received blankets and a meal and felt comforted at the increased amount of space compared with Fallingbostal. Other lads from the Division had been in the camp for a week or so. From their reports, they too had been kept first in an international camp, Stalag XIIA at Lindberg, in the same way as us. They met some of their friends for the first time since the landing, many a chap meeting a pal whom he had thought dead. Again we heard that, as Britons we were 'No.1 prisoners' here. I remember they gave us honey with our bread that night.

Conditions seemed far better for us at this new camp, with a large 300 yard wide square for exercise. The food too, was improved. On our first day we enjoyed better weather than we had so far done since entering Germany.

The compound proved big enough for football and we arranged inter-bungalow matches for the next day. Tired after this, we slept two in a bed for warmth. Any requests we had we put to the Germans through a 'man of confidence'. It was at this time that we each received, untouched and undamaged, a whole Red Cross parcel for ourselves and later we were issued with an Invalid Red Cross parcel between four men, which was routine for new prisoners. Sagan seemed a much more efficient place than our last camp and the roll calls, which had previously taken half an hour, were over in ten minutes here. They checked our numbers twice a day.

The various group leaders began to organise a concert party and we got together a harmonica band. Only 300 yards away, we discovered were South Africans in a Colonial compound. They offered to lend us some of their instruments. We managed to play more football matches and after three weeks without proper washing facilities at Fallingbostal, we were delighted to be marched to the bathhouse for 'delousing'. Our clothes too, were disinfected.

The 29th October saw the opening of a library and many of the books that began to circulate came from the South African compound. Classes began in German and French and a lot of the teachers were experienced men who had done the job before the war. Our Padre, a United Board representative, was a Scot who had been captured in 1940. He impressed us greatly with a sermon on 'Post War Religion'. Later that day our group leader organised a quiz and three of us obliged with popular songs on the harmonica.

The Germans issued us with sheets of paper to fill in and send to our next of kin. We were limited to 25 words. Oddly enough Gerry would not allow us to mark these messages with kisses. They suspected we might be using code! We were then told that a cable would reach each of our next of kin through the Red Cross in Geneva within the next ten days.

Each day, as October drew towards a close, it became colder and we were glad of the British Khaki shirts which we received. Our man of confidence told us to expect further issue of clothing later on and heard news with some thanks. The guards were very careful about talking to us, as punishment for any offence they were transferred to the Russian front. This threat ensured their silence. They were older than any of the enemy soldiers we had met and some were Poles who had been forced into the Wehrmacht.

On 31st October we were astounded to receive a half pint of beer each from the Germans. At first we could not believe it - but it was there! It was not quite up to the British beer but nevertheless it went down very well. After this however, we were warned that this softer treatment may have been an insidious method of discovering our weaknesses in an attempt to gain more co-operation from us. However, we were wrong. Half an hour after the drink had been given out, a square headed German, immaculately dressed came along to inform us that the beer had come from our South African friends.

We began to receive indoor games: drafts, jigsaw puzzles and chess. We used these more as the days grew colder. We had to do our washing then in organised sections, for the water only came on for three hours a day.

An RAF Warrant Officer joined us and told us that he had recently been picked up in Hanover while trying to escape for the third time. He held us all in interest with an impromptu talk on the 'Treatment of British Prisoners in Italy' during which he gave us some useful tips on escaping.

We received more Red Cross parcels from Argentina on 1st November, each of which had been pierced, like all Red Cross parcels. Fifteen months earlier, the Germans found a compass in one and had kept up this practice of piercing ever since. There were fifty cigarettes with each parcel and the Camp Leader had a reserve pool of these, known as the 'Black Market Pool'. We used them to bribe certain guards for amenities such as electric light bulbs. Cigarettes were recognized currency at the camp.

Some of our people erected goal posts in the compound and marked out a pitch. The Group Leader formed a club known as the Optimists to discuss sport, entertainment and various topics of interest to the group. We had a change in our man of confidence. The newcomer, our RAF Warrant Officer took on the job. We were entertained to a cinema show by the Germans, with one show depicting German culture and another on romance. During the show we rolled our own cigarettes from saved tobacco, using cigarette papers which had been given to us as we left the bungalows.

Some of the lads reported sick with colds on 4th November. That day we received a letter card each. Medical personnel were given two. We had softball, baseball and various games which kept us on the go and I noticed very few stayed in bed when there was football being played.

Through the wire we could see the Russians. They were poorly clad and ill nourished. They were forever asking for cigarettes and were prepared to swap hand-made gadgets and oddments for them.

Our Optimists Club was busy rehearsing for a concert party, which received a great ovation from the lads when it was staged. That type of entertainment did much to relieve the loneliness of prison life and boosted morale. The food was not quite as good as it had been when we arrived. On the advice of the Red Cross we put forward a complaint through our man of confidence about the low bread ration - a two kilogram loaf to six men. Next day, 11th November, they pacified us with the concession of a spoon between six men and some boxes of ersatz matches. The weather had become extremely cold and we collected our coal from the compound in a temperature 20 degrees below zero.

The South African compound staged the Gilbert & Sullivan opera 'Pirates of Penzance' to which we were invited. We enjoyed this greatly. The South Africans had been preparing for this show for six months and had made all the costumes themselves.

We ourselves were doing well with our harmonica band, made up of the leader, who had a chromatic harmonica and seven others. We received the harmonicas from the Padre, who got them from the Red Cross. We pooled the various group concert parties into a compound concert party and began the rehearsals for a show of our own, though the weather did not help us. It had become bitterly cold with frozen winds blowing from the east. Most of us stayed in our bed for warmth. Few men had overcoats and roll call was becoming an effort in the cold. Constant practice had brought our harmonica playing to a surprising pitch of perfection and our band capably harmonise in various keys.

One of the jobs I was given was to search the men for lice. I did this and a few cases were discovered, though one case of rubella came to light and we resolved to increase precautions against this.

I felt ill myself after we had our show and went straight to bed. The following day, 19th November, I reported sick and was shocked to hear the French doctor's pronunciation that it was diphtheria. A Polish doctor substantiated the diagnosis and I was at once admitted to the Lazarette or hospital, where I was placed in the isolation ward.

The ward was dull and apart from having four blankets and a bed, the outlook was not rosy. The French were staffing the hospital and the Corsican born French doctor was a specialist in infectious diseases. This knowledge and the doctor's efficient manner did much to give me confidence. He gave me anti-diphtheria injections, four at half hourly intervals and I was placed on a fluid diet. I looked around the ward. There with me were an American flyer, a corporal of the 2nd Parachute Battalion and

another Briton, a lad from the East Surrey Regiment. They informed me discretely that the night before, the former occupier of my bed had been carried out - with diphtheria! They took a throat swab the next morning and informed me that it would take a week at least, before the results of its examination would be known.

The French are great believers in the hypodermic but it must be said that the orderly was an expert at his job.

The English Padre came to see us and we questioned eagerly for news. His replies were disquieting. He told us that the British and South Africans had each a wireless in their compounds and that we would get some BBC news from our comrades. However, we were not to disclose this to the French. Until we knew them personally, he said, it would be better not to trust them.

We had quite a laugh when the French orderly came round in the evenings giving us an interpretation of the German communique and we had already heard the BBC news. The comparison showed up a lot of German discrepancies.

I was growing tired of the fluid diet of porridge or semolina twice a day followed by a cup of tea. I was glad to receive an invalid parcel. The diet however, was most suitable for bringing back to health anyone suffering from diphtheria.

I began to take an interest in the three others as I started to feel a little better. Each was a most interesting character in his own way. The American was an Air Force Captain. He had been an observer and bombardier. He had had a bad time in the previous three months. He had broken his jaw playing American football and had to have a plate installed. After this he had contracted bacillary Dysentery. He eventually shook this off and after less than two days health, when life had become worth living again, he contracted diphtheria. So, he was in the ward with us, still with a plate in his jaw.

In the bed next to me was an NCO of the Second Parachute Battalion, a chap with a broad Birmingham accent. The pair of us had quite a few things to discuss with our American friend on Flying and parachuting.

Then there was Frankie, a young boy who had been captured sixteen days after D-Day. He had been out with a working party at a sugar beet factory and had continued to work for three days after the feeling of trouble in his throat. He had gone on carrying about heavy bags of sugar on his back and had consequently done some damage to his heart. He was suffering rather badly from diphtheria. He is a grand lad but the death of the other patient the night before had depressed him. We joked with him, pulling his leg about his captivity and tried to occupy his mind in things other than his illness. We had to be careful though not to excite him. It hurt me almost as much as it hurt Frankie when the lads had to go on half rations, on orders from the doctor.

The staff too were worthy of study. The French doctor was charming in his manner and spoke, often humorously, in broken English. He had stern features, a firm jaw. He walked with an air of confidence in his own efficiency. He checked all injections personally and paid particular attention to the boy. He is Corsican born and proud of

it. He constantly discussed the difficulties of being a prison doctor with inadequate supplies.

Our ward orderly, a Frenchman called Andre spoke good English and it was obvious that he was sincerely concerned with his country's plight. Like all of us he hoped continually for the end of the war. He told us that he had worked in a chemist shop in a small French village, was married and happy in family life. He told us unconcernedly that he had permission to go into the town of Sagan any afternoon and was proud of the fact that the French could get anything they wished from the shops and from bartering with cigarettes.

Emile was Andre's assistant. Fair and well built. He took his job seriously. Then there was Jean, small dark and bustling, who took the temperatures and dashed about to show how busy he could be. It was he who translated the German news communique at 9pm each evening. He was also the only one of the French who repeatedly enquired if we had news from the BBC. The German news broadcast depressed him greatly.

On 25th November, some of the kit I had left in the bungalow was brought into the ward for me. The chap who brought it gave us the latest news from the hidden radio set. I was told that day by the French doctor that I would have to remain in bed for another six weeks. Apart from the hunger that we had to endure in the ward, boredom was my greatest enemy.

We all received three daily injections and once had an extra one of camphor in the thigh. I notice Frankie was in better spirits and any talk of Croydon, his home town cheered him wonderfully. I was told of the analysis of my throat swab - positive. However, the doctor said the Germans were not always accurate in this sort of work. We were visited by the British Medical Officer on 27th November and he told us that he was to be relieved by a South African. The day were given our first parcels since entering hospital.

It was during this stay in hospital that I read books that had been forgotten since my schooldays. Stories like *The Three Musketeers* and *Treasure Island*. The Germans gave us vitamin B tablets, which tasted quite well but Frankie became restless and had to be treated for a high temperature. He and the American however, did get replies to their mail, which is more than the corporal and I did. We presumed we had not been 'kriegies' for long enough. Some of the hospital amenities were extremely poor. We shaved only once a week and were able to wash only once a day because of the shortage of bowls and washing materials.

We were all getting sore in the arm with repeated injections and asked for a change of limb for the needle. I was asked by the French doctor if I would like to stay and work in the hospital, as I had been some help in compiling charts but I decided not to stay there.

1st December was bitterly cold and we were all sitting up in bed wearing our battledress tunics when Jean came round to take temperatures. Our pessimistic friend described so vividly the previous winter in Sagan that we reached out for extra clothes! The Padre visited us once more though he remained reticent about giving

BBC news. That day, weary after playing football, Jean slept through the German news broadcast and we did not hear his translation.

Our American was like a schoolboy the following day, when they removed the plate from his jaw. He sat up twisting his face about, reveling in the new found flexibility of his face. A grand chap, he was well supplied with cigarettes and handed them around to everyone, including the orderlies. The excitement of receiving the gift of cigarettes brought on a relapse in Frankie. He had been in the ward eight weeks then. He would imagine pre-war dishes like strawberries and cream.

The German reports on our throat inspections returned to the hospital and both the American and myself were stated to be free from infection. However, the French doctor insisted that we still had diphtheria. The injections we had used to remove our appetites and we could not eat anything at mealtimes. Unfortunately we were ravenous about two hours later but there was no food. We held a meeting. The American suggested that we should refuse injections and on 5th December we did. He argued with us and said he would have to report us to the Senior British Medical Officer. However, we did get our meals before the injections after that. Another concession was a bed bath. Our first and quite a luxury at that.

The parachute corporal was the first to go on normal diet. I remember how envious the rest of us were when we saw him at meal times. We said goodbye to our medical officer, a surgeon commander in the Royal Navy.

We saw an Australian who visited the hospital as an interpreter. He was actually of German descent and they allowed him to visit an aunt in Breslau, when he was sent out with the throat swabs. He was the man who supplied addresses which helped a lot of lads escape from our camp and contact the anti-Nazi underground movement in Germany.

We totalled up our injections and although I had been given no less than 72 during my stay in hospital, I had the lowest total in the ward. Young Frankie came top with 110.

Jean bustling in with his usual 'c'est froid ce matin, oui?' told us on the morning of 10th December that the winter's lowest temperature had been recorder that night - - 30 degrees of frost. That night for the first time we saw Robert, the tall and somewhat portly cook. He surprised us with hot milk at supper time.

Still no news from the Padre when he paid us his usual visit. He would merely agree with all that we said but would tell us nothing. That day, I remember, they gave us horse radishes, the first solid food we had tasted for some time and we relished them, though we were not too sure we had been right afterwards, when our throats began to burn.

Our American friend received all his personal kit, including more cigarettes. He handed us a pack each. A grand gesture from a fine fellow, for we were all in need of a smoke. He used to tell us about Stalag Luft III, where he had been and about the very tight discipline there. He said that no prisoner might speak to a guard direct but had to request from a distance, permission to speak from the feld-webel. The guards

were much afraid of their superiors there, as disobedience meant the dreaded Russian front.

We received more parcels on 13th December and made a deal with Andre for the meat that we were not allowed to eat. Young Frankie had developed a sort of paralysis of the legs and was receiving infra-red treatment. However, he would become hysterical and call out with such phrases as 'take me to eternity - no, take me to Croydon first'. It was amusing at times but we did not smile for we were all extremely sorry for him.

Our first snow fell on 14th December. It was far colder than English weather at that time of year and there was a biting wind from the east.

We had a visit from a Serb who worked in the Russian part of the isolation wards. He quite obviously wanted to exploit the American, to see if he could entice cigarettes from him. The man was an intelligent and capable linguist, who had mastered French, Russian, German and English. He promised bread for the American officer in exchange for cigarettes. He said he had been shot down flying a Bristol Blenheim. Strongly pro-Russian, his interpretation of the German news broadcast varied from Jean's and was filled with detail of Russian advances and of the stemmed march of the Western Allies. We enjoyed many a discussion on the merits of the various armies fighting the war. After a while though we discontinued the talks on 'foreign policy' and tried extracting information from him. Andre warned us not to trust him as he was quite the 'man about town' in Sagan. There, he was allowed to operate his own black market with the civilians. When next morning Emile took temperatures in place of Andre, he too warned us against the Serb. Alternately, when the Serb came back that night he warned us against the Frenchmen! We decided it was best to trust nobody.

The Serb talked of the beauty of his country and its culture. He revealed a most attentive memory for the names of American film stars and dance band leaders. He was an ardent student of American history but admitted that British history was much more difficult for him. It was too long and varied. Eventually he gave himself away with the enquiry: 'what is the latest BBC news?'

When we looked out on the morning of 17th December, we saw a beautiful morning. Sunlit and with a crisp white layer of snow. It presented a lovely sight once we had learned to ignore the barbed wire through which we had to view.

The news of 19th December was depressing, if we could believe Jean's translation of the German communique. He said the Germans had begun an offensive and that we should all have to remain in Sagan for years to come. We laughed at him. This annoyed Jean, for he felt sure that we had heard other news from the BBC. The Serb had helped to swing Jean over to the favour of the Russian sides and he told us excitedly that, in the west the Germans had shot down 124 planes, knocked out 200 tanks and captured 10,000 Americans. At this we laughed even louder.

Two days later, we heard from a BBC source though there had in fact been withdrawals, we had claimed 95 tanks and 275 planes. We remained calm about the new war situation when we heard this. More German successes were however,

reported in the enemy bulletins and Jean became so upset that he lost his top row of teeth and broke four thermometers. In the succeeding bulletins that Jean reported, the Germans reported that they were 'mopping up'. This we knew that their advance had been checked.

Our Serb continued to boast about the achievements of the Red Army and we had to admit that the Russians were indeed, advancing speedily through Hungary. He brought along a French grammar book, which Wilky, the other parachutist and myself absorbed over many an hour.

Wave after wave of bombers droned overhead, often escorted heavily by fighter planes. Our United States Captain told us the bombers were American, on daylight missions.

It was getting close to Christmas. Perhaps these raids were the Allied present to Adolf. We, ourselves were feeling the cold even more. Our fuel ration was restricted to six briquettes a day for each hospital ward and if it had not been for French scrounging, we would have frozen.

Christmas Eve came and went much like any other day, though the Officers and Other Ranks of Luft III camp sent each hospital patient five cigarettes. We also shared a Red Cross parcel between three and had visits from the French doctor, staff, the English doctor and the Padre.

It was extremely cold on Christmas morning and a thick fall of snow had lain during the night. We woke very early that day. The Serb lent us a gramophone and some Bing Crosby records and quite a few other favourites. Half way through the morning Andre brought us part of an invalid parcel, which we ate with the cup of cocoa that he gave us. The cocoa was our first in the prison camp. We had no trouble from the Germans who seemed to be celebrating Christmas in their own way, like everybody else. We had a delicious cup of coffee, made in the true French style by the French Roman Catholic Padre. An extra issue of spaghetti helped to boost further our Christmas fare and we each had an apple from the Serb.

The menu for that Christmas was bully beef and fried potatoes in the morning and bread, jam and a cup of tea. German soup, thickened with peas, carrots and potatoes for dinner, followed by Robert's ersatz jelly and blancmange. For supper, a meal supplied by the Serb, who had been truly generous. It was pancakes, another apple, biscuits, jam and bread and another cup of cocoa. We concluded what had been a much happier Christmas than we had expected with late night gramophone music. That day too, two of us were allowed up for the first time. It wasn't too easy walking about though.

On Boxing Day the food went back to 'normal'. It was reasonably good but inadequate for men who had been on fluid diets for weeks. Wilky had lost two stones when we weighed that day and I had gone from 12st 12oz to 10st 6oz. I had lost 2st 6oz. I quite frightened myself when I took a look for the first time in weeks at the full length reflection in the mirror.

Things seemed to have taken a turn for the better. Our American was put back onto solid foods and Frankie began to feel again the use of his legs.

On 27th December one of the lads in my own unit came in to see me, bringing 20 cigarettes from another friend in the unit and a home-made cake. It was quite delicious, though it had been made from crushed breadcrumbs and biscuits. We supplemented the day's tea with pancakes from Robert, made out of flour which the Germans had issued to those who were sick. When the French doctor told us we would soon be discharged and sent back to the Stalag, we at least knew we should be excused falling in for roll calls for the first month, which cheered us up somewhat. Before we left they gave us two invalid parcels between six men, which we regarded as gracious. We had a haircut, which we had before going back to the Stalag - cost, one cigarette.

We left the lazarette on 29th December, were interviewed by the German doctor after a four hour wait, and walked slowly towards the British compound. We arrived at the gates only to find that it had been changed and we had continued the walk to find our friends. I quickly contacted Joe, who had made the biscuit cake and he let me share his wooden bed, as no other was available. I soon learned from him that Stalag conditions had deteriorated badly, with parcels not arriving and the food unpalatable. The nights were bitterly cold. Through sharing the bed we could double the number of blankets. Nobody ever removed trousers and some chaps slept wearing battle tunics or airborne smocks. We all slept with our socks on.

After a while I was lucky enough to get my own bed, for I was moved to another section, still close to Joe. I was with two artillerymen named Leslie and Micky. We pooled our food and they were glad to have a 'brew' from the contents of my invalid parcel.

New Year's Eve we celebrated by listening to the South African Dance Band and drank 1945 in with a cup of tea. This was rather a mild beverage for the Scots amongst us that day! I noted with interest that we had troops with us from all countries of the Commonwealth in the compound.

The first huts housed Britons, then there were South African huts and opposite them coloured South Africans. On the far side of the compound were the Indians, who included Pathans, Sikhs, Gurkhas and Punjabis.

On New Year's Day, Ted Allen, who had been quartermaster and escapist food supplier at Apeldoorn, arrived at the camp with two others of the Airborne Division. Ted told me how he had got away from Apeldoorn himself soon after I had left and how he had remained with the Dutch underground movement for six weeks. These Dutch had successfully ferried the first party of escapists across the Rhine at Arnhem and they had got back to England. When it came time for the second group to cross the river, they received air supplies from the Allies. Two miles from the crossing point they had run into the Germans. Gerry was in battalion strength and in the ensuing fight Ted had been recaptured. They sent him to Limberg and then onto Sagan.

Talk in the compound continued to be about victory, when it would come and the inevitable discussions about food. We had rumours of the arrival of Christmas parcels on 2nd January but at the time we were still having to save the peelings of potatoes which had been cooked in their jackets. It continued cold and I noticed that most of the airborne men only had their smocks and shirts but no overcoats nor pullovers in a temperature of 30 degrees below freezing. The Germans deloused this scanty clothing on 4th January and that day we were issued with cigarettes. Les, Micky and I pooled ours, smoking one cigarette between three and saving the end for rolling. The arrangement worked well. At last on 6th January the Christmas parcels did arrive and we learned we had supplies enough for five weeks.

I was outside the hut taking fresh air when I looked across at the frozen trees outside the compound. They looked beautiful covered in silvery frost, as if they had been draped by some giant hand. I had never seen such an effect of frost in England and I was breath taken by the sight of it.

The next day we had a visit from our German Commandant. A typical Nazi, short, fat, pompous and with close cropped hair, surrounded by bodyguards. He stated through an interpreter that we had been selected as a reprisal camp and that our mattresses were to be removed as a reprisal for ill treatment which he alleged German troops had suffered in the Middle Eastern prison camps. We heard this at first in silence. The Commandant gloated. Then suddenly, the lads broke loose from the ranks, rushed to grab their mattresses and piled them on the horse carts, singing and shouting as they did it. We pushed the carts out of the gate with roars of laughter. Herr Kommandant was infuriated.

Next day he ordered roll call to be stepped up to five times a day but greatly to our surprise, this was followed by two issues of coffee. The 'old man' could not know about this, we thought. If he found out, we felt sure the Quartermaster would be off to the Russian front.

My two friends and I tried out an experiment which one of the lads had told us about. We made cigarettes out of German tea leaves but one smoke was enough to convince us that it had not been a good idea.

A rumour came out that six protected personnel (which included RAMC men) were to be repatriated and this caused some excitement in our hut, from which six were supposed to come. We heard that they were to be taken to Stalag VIIIB, at Lamsdorf, near Breslau. On 9th January the men were moved. They were mainly South Africans who had been staffing the sick bay. I was then appointed NCO in charge there. We gave messages and letters to the lucky ones who were being sent home and gave them a rousing send off.

The rapidity of the move out left us with a difficult job in reorganising the sick bay but we were running it smoothly enough within a day. We did not like having tuberculosis patients in the same building but had to put up with it. Rations were helped out that day by the issue of one-eighth of a Christmas parcel per man.

The Indian section, I discovered was run by an intelligent Sikh Sergeant. A well-educated man, whom I was to come to know better.

As further reprisals, on 11th January the Germans separated all NCO's from the men. This meant that we had to organise a separate sick bay for the private soldiers. A South African Officer was in charge of our sick bay and I had Ted and some of my friends from the old unit to help me clean out our new building. It was amazing to see how many chaps were promoted in that one day. Some from privates to sergeants!

Part of the work in the sick bay was taking blood samples from the suspected tuberculosis cases and arrange for X-rays. We had to inform the Germans of this as they had to provide an escort to take the cases over to the Lazarette. I had more trouble myself with a heavy cold from the overwork of the moving and was ordered to bed. My ears were giving me trouble too. A chap named 'Dizzy' took over from me as NCO in charge.

The South African native orderlies were doing a grand job. One was Maybe Jim, six foot three, broad and capable of doing the work of two men. He was meticulously clean but did not get on too well with the Indians. The two others, Victor and Jacob were good orderlies but lacked Jim's stature. Jim had been a Johannesburg gold miner and I remember Jacob by his peculiarly shaped nose and Charlie Chaplin walk.

I felt depressed at being back in a sick bed but I was heartened to be given milk chocolate by the South Africans, who received parcels one day. It was my first chocolate since England. We also had jellies and hot drinks from Billie the cook.

By 16th January I was feeling much better and had been issued with a new pair of battledress trousers. Really the separation of men from the NCO's had not caused as much inconvenience as the Germans had anticipated.

We smiled during the day as the South Africans and Indians argued with each other. Ali Singh smiled with us and diplomatically kept out of the arguments. These sessions lasted about a half hour every evening and often became so heated that we had to shut up both parties in the end.

By 18th January I was back at work and after much persuasion by our Medical Officer, the Germans issued us with 300 new Ersatz blankets. We also received 21 Red Cross medical parcels, which contained drugs urgently needed for the patients. Without these parcels, our medical organization in the prison camp would have collapsed.

No praise could be high enough for the Red Cross. It made me proud that I could be of help to the Britons and Dominion troops who were sick. The German bandages were ersatz, like so much of their materials. They were easily torn and wounds would bleed through them.

The Germans let the protected personnel move about from one section of the compound to another and they took roll call in the sick bay without ceremony, which showed some understanding. We were given bulk Red Cross food parcels from the Argentine on 18th January and the following day I was given a beautiful scarf by Billy the Masseur.

We kept a complete stock book of the issues of food parcels and the Medical Officer checked this for us and kept an eye on the patient's meals.

On top of the new trousers and the scarf I received that month, I got some woolen underwear from Paddy, the cook.

We had a programme of dance music from the South African dance band on 20th January and some of the Indians sat up in bed to listen, despite the cold. Victor the orderly fell ill with tonsillitis and his friend Edwin took over his duties with zeal.

The winter cold continued and hearing of our shortage of clothing, the British and American flyers in Luft III sent us over greatcoats and other clothes which curiously fitted all our needs.

There was a little trouble between one of the English orderlies and an Indian patient who had been arguing. One was apparently called 'Churchill's sweeper' and in reply, for the man had served in India, the Briton called out 'Gandhi's sweeper'. The Indian reported it but nothing came of the matter.

Ted's sick bay became disbanded and those who still needed treatment came to us. The Germans offered us another hut for extra patients but it was in a terrible state of filth.

We were by now receiving regular readings of the BBC news from two chaps who took it down in shorthand from a crystal set which they had hidden in the cinema. The code word for the broadcasts was 'Charlie Higgins' and we posted a sentry at the hut door when the news was being read over to us.

We rearranged the sick bay amongst ourselves on 24th January, leaving half of it to our South African and Indian friends. We moved into the other half ourselves with Ted's staff from the former private's sick bay helping out.

Ted, Ali Singh and the South African orderlies stayed at our end. Outside, the Germans were making a definite effort to segregate the NCO's and men.

I am ordered to bed again, this time with 'flu. I found myself being pumped full once more of the Red Cross fluid diet. It was about this time that we began to notice German civilians moving westwards past the camp. We knew what this meant. The Russians were drawing near. The refugees were moving along a road which led towards Berlin. They were supplying their own transport of prams, horses and carts and any were on foot. It was pitiful to see the old folk in such circumstances.

I felt much better after a good night's rest and was cheered by the news that the Russians were only 70 miles to the east. Everybody began to ask 'when will Joe turn up?' On 28th January I got up for a little while and spent some of the day watching the hordes of civilians going towards Berlin. The military traffic was trying to get through in the other direction.

The following day, Divvy, one of the South African clerks who had been a Justice of the Peace in Transvaal State, went sick. So did Ernie, one of our staff, which depleted our nursing strength. The coloured South Africans often discussed what seemed to be a common problem with Divvy, speaking in Afrikaans as they did so.

The sick bay was run as strictly and according to schedule as any military hospital, with the temperature and pulse charts well up to date and a careful check being kept on dangerous drugs. One problem was getting the Gurkhas to bed. They seemed to have a mania for playing cards with the Sikhs. Sergeant Ali Singh was very helpful in this, as he was in all affairs between South Africans and Indians. His quiet voice kept them in order. His was a dynamic personality. He had accomplished in this hut what we had failed to do in the others. He had successfully mixed South Africans and Indians.

By 30th January, though it remained very cold, the early thaws had begun and the compound was a quagmire. It was at this time we first heard the distant rumble of heavy guns and the sound of demolition explosions. The sound sent our morale up 100%. The German Home Guard was on duty keeping the hurrying civilians organised and in our compound, mud was inches thick with the thaw and each trip outside meant a change of socks on return.

On 2nd February, we heard the distinct sound of long range shelling and German bombing of Russian lines. More and more civilians pushed each other past our camp. German troops were in the area but they were mainly long range artillery men and there was little sign of infantry. Next day, the sun shone and among the German civilians we could see RAF men and American flyers from Luft III who had obviously been marched out by the Germans.

A contingent of British prisoners was brought in the next day and a sergeant of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps told me they had been marched from Kosel, near Breslau.

The food situation became worse and the Germans made the ration nine men to a loaf instead of six. The soup became weaker and less plentiful. Fortunately we still had the Red Cross parcels.

We had a further shower of snow but it quickly melted in the sun. The German civilians kept trekking through it and we saw a whole German bicycle battalion en route for Berlin. This caused the assumption that the Germans did not intend to put up much resistance here.

Two hundred British soldiers were brought in after a sixteen day march from Tosch, where they had been kept working. Their feet were in an appalling state and none of them would be fit to continue for some time. They gave us good news of the Russian advance and assured us that Uncle Joe would be within our area within ten days.

By 5th February the last of the thousands of flyers from Luft III had been moved out. They were to march the south-east roadway with the refugees. Even more activity than usual was evident among the German soldiers. By the time the snow had

completely disappeared and its place had been taken by rain. We were glad of a quarter of a Red Cross parcel each.

The rain seemed to hamper movement on the road but we heard that there was a Red Cross train in Sagan evacuating sick flyers from Stalag Luft III. By 7th February we were expecting to be marched out to follow the airmen. Sgt Ali Singh stated that if the Germans did try to move us he was prepared to retire to a hole in the asbestos roof which he had already prepared.

At 5am on 8th February, the Germans came in and announced that the whole camp, except for a few sick men and medical personnel would evacuate by 0800 hours. The Germans issued Argentine Red Cross food parcels before the move off but this issue delayed them and they had to fire off a few rounds of rifle ammunition above our heads to halt the parcel issue and get us outside the wire. The lads threw the remaining food over the wire to prevent the Germans getting it. Our cook, Paddy went out and collected a good deal of food for the patients. The Germans kept behind about 350 patients and our South African Medical Officer refused to move these men unless transport was provided.

After the others had gone, we were allowed to salvage what we could from the vacated huts. We procured a good stove and one or two pieces of furniture.

Those of us who were fit to move about donned Red Cross brassards or armbands and went out to fetch coal and wood. In doing this we found a supply of helmets and gloves.

The French compound was still occupied but the Germans had their hands full keeping the French behind the wires. The French too wanted to salvage what we could. We were allowed to go to the magazine for some Indian Red Cross parcels. We received a parcel between each two men. Sgt Singh made us curry and rice in the Indian fashion which we found most appetising.

The Germans asked for numbers of lying and walking sick and told us to get ready for more British prisoners. That day more of our men did arrive, after a twenty day march. There was more artillery in use up towards the line. The refugee column moved more quickly than ever. We could see the Germans installing 88mm guns in the woods to the south of the camp.

Some of our people found more clothing and we began to equip ourselves as best we could for the forthcoming journey either towards the German or Russian lines. We did not know which way it would be. By 11th February there were less than a hundred Germans at the camp, mostly sick men and one Polish German Officer. We took advantage of the situation to obtain more parcels from the magazine or shop. A party of us went to Sagan railway station where there was a large magazine. There we found German civilians and troops helping themselves to the food. We felt we could hardly blame them under the circumstances. We got a cartful and as we were leaving, tank crews were helping themselves to the Red Cross parcels in there. We issued one parcel to each man in the camp for the journey to come and one between two men for use right away. We discovered then that of the 20,000 prisoners who had been kept at the camp, only 1,600 now remained.

We noticed that the German guards were gradually diminishing and a German officer told us that, if we remained, we did so at our own risk. We took the law into our own hands. We raided the store for food and captured what we estimated to be a month's supply.

All next day, heavy artillery was in action and Russian aircraft were strafing troops or supplies not far away. 12th February brought us more activity all round and we warned not to venture too far away from the bungalows as German troops were still in the woods and on the roads. In the afternoon, German six-barrelled mortars were in action and German troops were retreating along the roads to the south. Late in the evening we heard the rumble of tanks, Tiger Mk IV's. At the same time, German SS troops were moving up to support the tanks. Passing them in the opposite direction were German cycle battalions. The following day brought us an early morning artillery duel between the two armies.

The Russians seemed to be massing on the far side of the River Bober, a tributary of the Oder which ran through Sagan. They seemed to be preparing a bridgehead over this. The Germans, on the other hand, were installing light and heavy machine guns, anti-aircraft guns and strong points around the camp. It looked as though they were preparing to fight there.

Some Russian prisoner still left in the camp insisted that the Russians would soon reach us and were only about six kilometres away. We could hear German six-barrelled 'sobbing sisters' in action all day and we began to make Red Cross flags in case we should need them. Above us German fighters and Russian 'Stormovik' dive bombers were locked in dog fights. When the planes pulled out of the fight, the German anti-aircraft guns would go into action but with little accuracy. Activity in the battle reached its peak on 14th February, with Russians concentrating their efforts on Sagan, which they set on fire with long range artillery. I stayed up most of the night and by morning, we gathered the Bober bridge head was about to begin.

The artillery of the opposing armies pounded away most of the following day. In the middle of it we had a visit from a Russian doctor who said that the Russians had been pushed back two kilometres, beyond Sagan but would return in greater numbers. We saw more air battles during the day and witnessed the shooting down of a number of planes though we could not distinguish whose they were.

At about 4pm on 15th February, we saw a smoke screen set up. We expected this and took it as the signal for the Russian crossing of the Bober. We could hear machine gun fire plainly in the distance. Late that evening, our friend the Russian doctor told us his people had established their bridge head, two kilometres wide and were only three miles from us. We felt this confirmed as we saw German 88mm guns and watched the light ack ack guns move back down the southerly road. There were still a few SS troops about and we kept in the huts. Our carts were ready, our Red Cross parcels intact and we were all ready to move when the opportunity came.

Eight of us formed a syndicate to share what we had and most of the lads did the same, grouping off and pooling what they owned. We all felt fit to march and the will

to get up and march out was never stronger than that day. We felt uncertain about the reception we might receive from the Russians.

Our medical officer distributed among the medical staff what medical supplies we might need on the journey.

The actual arrival of the Russians took us somewhat by surprise. We were awakened by the rattle of machine guns close by and by 10am of 16th February; the Red Army was in Sagan. The battle was all about us and bullets whistled across the compound. By noon, Red Army troops were around the camp, though in small numbers and our medical officer gave the sign to move out. We struck off along the southerly route.

We posted watchers to keep an eye out for German troops and reached the German hospital without casualties, though we were fired on by a sniper. When we arrived however, the Medical Officer found that he had left his medical kit in the camp. John, a medical orderly and I decided to go back for it.

Our position was precarious. Half way back a sniper began to shoot at us. Two Russian soldiers on cycles saw this and began to argue about it. We were unarmed and quickened our pace to catch up with our main party. We did so and began to feel comparatively free and ready for the long march.

Ted and the other seven men took hold of the fire cart which we had removed from the Stalag fire station and we marched off with it to a field about two kilometres from the camp, with the rest of the English prisoners.

We saw the Russian soldiers at close quarters for the first time. They looked hardy individuals, invariably with a Tommy-gun slung over the shoulder. We noticed the Russians had no mechanical transport but relied on horses and carts.

We met the Russian Colonel in charge of the area, when we were at the field. He told us that we should have to march into the Russian back area. We disposed of all unnecessary kit and went off, tugging the fire cart along with us, loaded with our food. The whole column was on the move at about 5pm, making for Sprotau [*Szprotawa*], about 30km away. After about an hour's marching, our cart broke down and we lost the main column. We did not feel too happy about being left behind, as we had been warned about Germans who were still in the woods. It was obvious that the Russians had advanced swiftly across the area and had not had time to 'mop up'. All along the roadway, houses hit by their guns were still burning. However, all went well and by 1am on the morning of 17th February, we were within a couple of kilometres of Sprotau.

We rested here for water and unfortunately lost one of our men. We crossed the Bober [*Bobr*] by a Russian made bridge and reached the town at about 4am. We found an empty German house and slept there until 8am. When we got up, we set out for the main square, where the Russians were sorting out prisoners into their various nationalities. They separated all the British and told us we would have our names given to the British Red Cross, so that our next of kin could be told where we were.

We saw one or two Germans that the Russians had captured. They looked decidedly ill and had been stripped of all possessions except the clothes they wore.

The man who interpreted for the Russians was, strangely enough, an Australian. He said the Russians were the 1st Ukrainian Army under Marshall Rokossovsky. The Ukrainians were cocky, which was natural for an advancing army. The Russians registered us and allowed us to go through the town and take what we wished. They encouraged us to speed up when we passed a large airfield, well-guarded by Russians. That evening we reached a village called Plimkenau [*Przemkow*], where we spent the night.

Our column was headed by the medical officer, one or two warrant officers and some senior NCO's. The marchers were Britons, French, Americans, South African coloured's and a small contingent of Indians. The Indians were a colourful group who kept us in good spirits with their ready humour. With us was Maebe Jim, the big coloured South African, Victor and Jacob, the Zulu.

Maebe Jim presented a humorous spectacle in a big black overcoat and shiny top hat, which he had picked up. Jacob wore a woollen cap with a tassel and pushed a pram which he had found. Inside the pram was a white terrier which seemed to enjoy the ride immensely. The Indians had the luck to come across a stray horse and two of them rode this.

As we went along the rode we saw how the Russians had effectively dealt with a number of German tanks. The crews had been left where they had been killed. We saw no Russian dead, only the grave of an officer marked with a cross surmounted by the Red Star.

We renewed the washers of our cart and oiled the whole thing thoroughly before starting out the next day, 18th February. We were marching through wooded countryside and we passed numerous dead Germans and their horses. We noticed that in each case, the Germans were missing their jack boots. One or two Russian tanks had been knocked out and most had been hit in the turret.

Up to then we were given no food by the Russians but they did allow us to kill whatever we could find for food. This, with our Red Cross parcels, kept us going well enough. One day we caught three rabbits and a chicken.

About 17 km from our start point we went through the village of Wiesau [?] and were told that Glogan [*Glogow*], nearby was still in German hands. On that cock-eyed front, we had marched 55 kms into what we had thought was the Russian back area. We actually found ourselves less than 10 mls from the German lines once more.

That night we finished a march of 25 km at a three bedroomed house, where we cooked up rabbits and had a hearty meal. During the meal we were startled to hear screams coming from the yard and I dashed round to see what was happening. There, watched by an audience of South Africans, Maebe Jim was holding down a pig whilst he cut its throat with an army knife. As he was doing this he shouted 'Die quickly, you big fat pig cause I sure am hungry!' His triumph over the pig was greeted

with a cheer by the others and Jim's gleaming teeth flashed back a broad grin. Six of us occupied the three beds and the two unlucky ones had to take the floor.

Earlier that day, I had the audacity to ask for some bread from a Russian soldier and we sampled the loaf he had given us. It was poor quality, worse than the German bread and was terribly sour, obviously deficient of salt.

On 19th February we reached a set of main crossroads near Glogan and waited while our medical officer went on a reconnaissance. We found Glogan still remained in German hands so we marched off quickly in the other direction, towards Stenau [?]. As we passed through the village of Luben [*Lubin*] we saw French and Polish refugees, some of whom were women. They knew we were British and felt safe in joining our convoy.

We passed through Luben to small place 7 kms to the west, where we found a house to stay the night. It was occupied by an old man, his wife and their daughter. They were delighted to know we were British for they had all their possessions taken away by the Russians. They offered us a spare room and the use of their kitchen for cooking.

The old man told us, through Jack, our German speaking interpreter, that he was British. He said that he had married his Polish wife in England and said that he had fought with the British Battalion in the Boxer Rebellion, in China in 1901. He proved this with a photograph of himself in British Khaki drill, with the battalion.

That night we prepared our meal of three chickens, potatoes and onions and gave the old folk two chickens.

During the next day's march we saw much evidence of the German defeat, for their dead were lying everywhere. In almost every case, their jack boots had been removed. We also noted with interest that many cows and sheep had been killed deliberately, presumably by the Germans in their retreat. They had done this to prevent the Russians using the livestock for food. It seemed the Russian system was to march with the livestock and kill it as it was needed. They appeared to use no system of bulk or composite rationing, as our armies did. The only food they seemed to carry was the salt less, sour bread. A common meal for 'Ivan' seemed to be a hunk of raw pork or other meat in one hand and dried bread in the other. The pork was sometimes cooked, if women were accompanying the troops, which was quite often the case.

The food which we managed to find daily helped to give us the will to march. I brought out my harmonica often to keep the lads cheerful and in good spirits.

After starting late on 20th February, we had to hurry to catch up with the main column. In doing so we hurried past a large airstrip with Hurricanes, Boulton-Paul Defiants from Britain and Air Cobras supplied by America, lined up on the tarmac. These were very carefully guarded by the Russians. Four kilometres beyond here we came upon a village. It was only midday but most of the column needed to rest, so we scattered to reconnoitre the place. We found it to be larger than we expected. The Germans had obviously put up terrific resistance and the mortar pits and

machine gun points they had set up still held their dead. Again without boots or weapons.

In some cases it was obvious the Russians had shot the Germans as they had tried to surrender. After treatment the Russians had received on that front, this was understandable to us. The war in that theatre was ruthless and open to atrocities.

We spent the night in a large empty house. Maebe Jim, Jacob and Edwin upstairs and John and I down. Edwin killed a pig before Jim could get to it and we had dinner. After dinner, John and I took the medical pack round the rest of the column, patching up blistered feet and doing what we could for the men with diarrhoea, caused by eating Russian bread. We treated our Polish and French friends too for many had bad blisters too.

Back at the house someone found a steel bath which we claimed and had cleaned out. In the village we met some Russian soldiers who helped us kill some small livestock. They warned us not to go out in the darkness as they expected shooting to break out with German wounded who might still be in hiding. We took heed and hurried on the way to a flour mill, where we salvage three large bags of sugar, humping them back to the house before dark. That night we enjoyed our first bath for some time. As we went to bed that night, we could hear terrific bombing being carried out in the vicinity of the village. We guessed it was the airfield being attacked.

Next day we made for Stenau [*Scinawa*], crossing by a temporary bridge over the River Oder. All three original bridges had been destroyed by the Russian Sappers and Pioneers had done a good job on the emergency bridges. We marched straight through Stenau, a dreary place where there were plenty of inactive Russian troops. We then made through the villages of Kreslau [*Krzelow*] and Buschen [*Bozen*]. Then onto a small village 12 kilometres from Stenau, where we met a sociable group of refugees on their way back to Poland. They had taken over a deserted house and welcomed us into it. We were glad of the shelter for it had begun to rain hard. We soon had a brew going and cooked pancakes for supper.

On 22nd February we marched through Wehlau [*Wolow*], Altwohlau [?] and Brummwohlau [?]. At Wehlau our medical officer obtained a horse and cart from the Russians for our sick men. Two of the party rode in the cart: Ted with mumps and Dizzy with a sprained ankle. Eventually we came to Stroppen [*Strupina*] and found the place in uproar. Evidently, the Russians were celebrating the anniversary of the Red Army and many of them were drunk. The Commandant at the village decided to give us some food. After we had given three cheers for the Red Army he let us have bread, sugar, rice and meat. We spent the night in a leaky roofed house. Few of us had any sleep because of the continuous rain. We had to keep moving about to avoid drips.

The following day took us through Gelansdorf [?], Gauschnitz [?] and Tesnitz [?]. The going was slow due to the growing number of refugees who had joined our column. Moving slowly we had time to appreciate the fierce fighting which must have taken place. German dead still lay exposed. Some had been flattened by tanks, over and over again. Some had been partially eaten by dogs. As we looked, we thanked God it was winter and that we were not passing such scenes in summer heat.

We pushed on, finding it hard going in the mud with the cart until late afternoon, when we came to Trebnitz [*Trzebnica*]. Here we were stopped by a Luxembourg girl who was in a school there. She asked if we had any news of a certain British prisoner of war from Kosel but we could not help her. We had to tell her he may have been marched out with the retreating Germans. She wanted to join us but the Russians arrived and broke up the group.

We halted outside Trebnitz while the medical officer went in to enquire about billets for the night. We were unlucky and pressed on to a village 4 kms beyond where we found our best billet yet. A German woman, her mother and son were in the house and welcomed us when they knew we were British. They were petrified by the Russians who were in the village. They insisted we sleep in their beds because these were nearest the door. They asked us to answer should the Russians come. We assured them that we would. We cooked a hearty meal and asked them to join us, which they did.

Before we left, the woman told us that her husband had been taken away for forced labour. As we waved goodbye, she wept in the doorway.

We could well understand the fear of the German woman for the Russians had given a terrifying display in the village. Troops and their officers had been drunk and had fired off bursts from their tommy guns just as they felt like it. There was no sign of discipline whatever.

The next day's journey was slowed down by refugees pushing carts along the road back to their homes in Poland. We broke the shaft of our cart and brewed up in a gateway while our 'technicians' went to work on it. We caught up with the column in $\frac{3}{4}$ hr, claiming a couple of chickens on the way.

We spoke to a well-educated Russian officer, who spoke fluent English as well as many other languages. He asked us what we thought about the Russians and about Russia, asking us to be frank. We told him plainly and strangely, he agreed with us that the Russians were in some ways backward. He said they were an ignorant nation, illiterate but hardy warriors. Then he made a most interesting statement. He said Stalin had made two mistakes. He had allowed the Russians to see Europe and had allowed Europe to see the Russians.

Russian officers who were dining with this 'intellectual' had no table manners and used neither knives nor forks. However, they had beautiful and obviously looted plates and dishes. It looked somewhat out of place. Lovely plates and big husky Russians eating like cannibals. One Colonel sat gnawing on the leg of a chicken, which he held in one hand with a hunk of bread in the other.

We travelled on until we came to Bincherau [?], 18 kilometres from Oels [*Olesnica*], the town where we had been promised transport by the Russians. We were not going to believe that until we were actually aboard the transport. We had already experienced the lack of Russian efficiency. Before going to bed early, John Jones and I held our sick parade and found some of the lads suffering from diarrhoea.

On 25th February, we held up at the outset by the refugee column once more and while we were waiting we were addressed by some Russian troops who smelled strongly of drink. We saw what they had in the bottles they held but at first could hardly believe it. A strong sniff quickly convinced us - pure methylated spirits!

However, this was not all. We had observed many times before how strongly the Russians guarded their petrol stores and trucks. We didn't realise until that day that it was not only against saboteurs. We actually saw their own troops draining petrol tanks and drinking the petrol. It was practically unbelievable but we had witnessed it with our own eyes.

That day Captain Norman came along the column and asked if the sick had been treated. I told him they had. He then said that all the young women in the column had been raped during the night by Russian troops. Some of the lads had had watches and fountain pens removed by our so-called Russian allies. To me they appeared barbarous. Bear in mind that if your wife or sweetheart had been in that column she too would have been violated. Those girls were French, Polish and other nationalities but because a person was British or American it made no difference to those rebels.

You could tell them that the transport they were driving was American but they invariably replied 'No! No! It's Russian!' It was always Russian. Propaganda had been pumped into them and they believed every piece of their equipment had been made in Russia.

In the afternoon, we arrived in Oels and scrounged some tobacco and bread off the local people. We were not surprised when the Russians took charge of our column and marched us straight to the station and into open cattle trucks.

The weather was very cold and we had very little warm clothing. The train pulled out without much delay but moved slowly. After more than three hours we had done no more than 38 miles. Still we were thankful to be off our feet. From the trucks, we had a good view of the countryside. I had never seen so much dead livestock along the whole march as there was on that stretch of line.

We arrived at Kriesberg [*Klucbork*] at 2am and stayed there the night in cold wooden huts. We were frozen stiff from the train journey as it was and these huts made us feel disgruntled. Then they told us we had de-trained by mistake. We should have stayed on the train for Tschenstakowie [*Czestochowa*], our destination. We had not expected the Savoy at the station for we had become used to 'roughing it'. However, we did at least think they could have let us have some heating or light. At that time, we were travelling through the richest coal mining area of Poland.

One amusing incident did occur near Oels. When we looked into an empty house to see if we could see anything worth taking for our journey, we saw a Russian Captain turning the handle of a wringer for clothes. As we watched him, he turned the handle ever more violently and to our amazement, he put his ear to the rollers and waited, listening for music. This went on for five minutes or more until; exasperated he picked up the wringer and hurled it through the window into the street. Every day brought us further education in Russian culture and life.

On 26th February we were told by the Russian stationmaster that the train would move off at 7.30am. Seven hours after that, it did in fact; pull out into fine but cold weather. In the adjoining truck were French POW's who, like some of our own men, had been in prison camps for five years.

The countryside was desolate and barren of all crops and the train made frequent halts. During one of these I slipped out of the truck and visited a nearby Polish farmhouse where, when they knew I was English, I was given some potatoes. They thought us wonderful people but detested the Russians. In fact, their contempt for them was worse than they had for the Germans.

We arrived at Tschenstakovie at midnight and rested in a similar hut to the one where we had stayed the night before. Each of us was so tired, cold and hungry that we crept away into corners and slept.

In the morning, we rose early and marched into the town. We found it well populated and the municipal services seemed to have returned to normal. At some large buildings we met some other British lads who were housed there. They told us that the previous week 450 British prisoners had been taken to Odessa, on the Black Sea for shipment back home in British vessels. We anticipated that our journey would be similar to that.

The Russians issued us with rations of one third of a loaf, meat, sugar, oats, tobacco and matches per man each day. We were housed in a large school which the Germans had converted into a barracks and were 24 to a room. It was comfortable and we had a fire. We were directed to the Russian registration office, where they took our particulars. They wrote our names as they were pronounced rather than as they ought to have been spelled. John Jones and I were given a medical inspection room to open up and operate. A staff Sergeant of the New Zealand Medical Corps helped us with supply of quite a bit of Red Cross medical supplies and instruments.

We had our first sick parade the next morning. Most of the men who had arrived with us went down to the town for Turkish baths, which we appreciated greatly. Most of us had become lice carriers during our travels.

After the baths, we toured the town and found a very good black market in operation, on which clothes were the best-selling articles.

One of the lads sold the towel he had taken with him for the bath. We decided that our combine of eight would pool spare clothing for sale on the black market in exchange for bread, jam and cigarettes. The same day we obtained two loaves of delicious white bread. The Russians made no attempt to hide their disapproval of this British intrusion into their special black market. However, there were always ways and means, principally in the back alleys. In our favour, the Poles were prepared to trust us and they did not trust the Russians. The Poles never knew whether those troops would pay or not for the goods they took. Tommy gun over his shoulder and a few drinks inside him and the Russian invariably refused to pay up.

Our billet was warm at night and we felt good to be able to walk into town as we did then without Germans watching us.

The Polish money we used were called Zlotys and we obtained them through black market sales, then used it to buy the food we wanted.

There were about 3000 French prisoners of war as well as the 600 British there. The Russians managed to get the French to work. They tried it with us but we refused. We did however; look after the French sick in the sick bay which we opened up for both nationalities. The French had their own orderlies and medical officers but they did nothing for their sick. They left it to the 'stupid British' as the Germans had so often called us.

We spoke to some Poles in the town, who explained their position under the so called efficient rule of the Russians. They claimed they had been far better off under the Germans, who had issued everyone with a ration card. The Russians had given cards only to the workers in the family.

On 2nd March, we signed a registration card in triplicate for the Russians, who said one copy would go to Moscow, one to Geneva and one to London. We signed but we wondered.

We liked walking in the town even if it was only for exercise but there was a curfew at 2000 hrs every evening after which one could always hear the sound of shooting, with the bullets flying at those who failed to comply with the rule.

The next day, more British lads arrived by the same weary train route we had travelled.

We discovered an American film was showing in town and went along. It had Polish subtitles but this suited us fine as we understood the English. The Polish cashier let us in free. He said we need not pay as the Russians only paid when they felt like it.

At this we could imagine what our own country would be like under this so-called communist system. We saw examples of Russian barbarism daily in the town. Once, two Russian guards were striding along the pavement and in the opposite direction were two old ladies, walking slowly along. The Russians did not deviate an inch but roughly pushed the old ladies into the roadway. With this sort of thing happening every day we expected skirmishes or even some sort of revolution breaking out. We hoped to get away before it began.

We expected to move out at any time. John and I collected what medical supplies we could and put them in a German haversack I had brought from the prison camp. On 6th March, we were told to be ready to move off at a minutes notice, sometime that evening. Only 300 would be going then and the remainder would follow in a few days. When the time came, they had not placed Frank Kelly among the 300 but we managed to smuggle him aboard the lorry. The lorries were American made, four-wheel drive vehicles, open topped and bitterly cold to ride.

We travelled until the early hours of the morning like this with only three slices of bread as rations. During the night the whole convoy went off the road and in

temperatures of 30 below freezing we spent hours pushing the lorries back on the road. It was snowing like blazes too and we struggled.

At 5am the following morning, we stopped at a school outside Katowice [*Katovice*], where we brewed tea. The convoy split up on the journey into the town and one of the lorries broke down. Eddie and Ted Allen were in it and had to walk 10 miles to complete the journey. Nine of us in our combine (we accepted another who had worked in the sick bay) had a meal supplied by French cooks and shared a room with more Frenchmen. They were a lively crowd and had a swing band and a couple of vocalists.

We noticed that a few of the coal mines were already in operation again in Katowice. Some Italian prisoners were working in them. The Russians had wasted no time in putting them to work.

The following day we marched down to the railway station where box cars were waiting for us. They were enclosed and had stoves. Although we were packed in rather uncomfortably, we did not mind as we knew we were bound for Odessa. The train moved out and at last we were on our way. However, that night, we got no further than a siding a little way outside town. We discovered there was a kitchen attached to the train and we had rations for 21 days aboard. We were about 450 strong in the British contingent and we had married compartments for those Britons who had married Polish girls.

John Jones and I were given a small truck behind the kitchen truck (which was very handy), to use as a sick bay. Among our patients was an American, Lt Hirsch, an Airborne glider pilot. He had things well organised in the truck with ample fuel and a couple of white loaves and some real coffee with the rest of the rations.

We moved off slowly, late at night on 10th March and journeyed uneventfully until 1300 hrs the following day. Disaster then came upon us. The train crashed and six trucks, including ours, were destroyed.

All I remember of the crash was a terrific crunching noise and a beam dropped less than six inches behind me, only just missing me. As soon as we realised what was happening, we told the patients to jump for it. Out they went, half-dressed into the bitter cold. We followed in seconds but as soon as the train came to a standstill we moved back in among the wreckage. We got rid of the stoves to prevent further disaster from fire.

I salvaged as much medical kit as I could and we got to work to remove the bodies. Ted Allen and the 'combine' were also in one of the smashed trucks and were shaken up but none of them was seriously injured.

We pulled out fifty three wounded and eight dead. Thirty were injured badly and one of the injured died later. Three of the New Zealanders were killed, one of them Staff Sergeant Frazer, the popular New Zealand Medical Corps NCO who had befriended us earlier. The train RSM, captured at Dieppe was also killed. One lad, a Welch Guardsman was found dead in this train that was taking him after being away since 1937. All the dead had been prisoners of war for over four years.

After getting the wounded into trucks and laying out the dead, we carried on with treatments. The lads were salvaging food and putting it in the remaining trucks. All this time the Russians made no attempt to help. On the contrary, one of the Russian guards was caught stealing a watch from the dead RSM's pocket. A big British lad caught him and took him to the Russian Commandant, who gave him a 'ticking off'. At this the Briton took matters into his own hands, hauled the Russian behind a truck and gave him a sound thrashing.

One lad, George Wrigglesworth, who had been in Ted's truck, was trapped under a beam and as he lay there helpless, a Russian crawled through the wreckage to cut off his wrist watch. This time the Russian was reported to a higher Russian authority who had arrived after the crash. The man was marched off.

Before we could move on, Polish workers had to get the wrecked trucks off the line. The rest of the trucks were then coupled and we steamed into Kracow [*Krakow*].

One explanation for the crash was that saboteurs had uncoupled some of the trucks whilst we were going downhill. With the weight of 20 full coal trucks bearing down on the train, this caused the rest of the box cars to telescope. No official explanation was given by the Russians. They blamed the Poles.

Later, the Red Cross representative in Kracow said that the Russians had shot the Kracow stationmaster for inefficiency. The poor chap had known nothing of the crash.

Immediately the accident occurred, the Russians at Kracow were informed. However, when we arrived eight hours later, there were no ambulances waiting for the injured or any transport at all. Only when our Medical Officer went to inquire did we get lorries, with straw on the floorboards. There were no blankets for injured men in a temperature twenty degrees below zero.

The Poles, in their poor state fed the rest of us and we slept on the station where we had no other place to sleep. Our wounded, thank God were eventually taken to a Polish hospital, where Poles could care for them. Our dead were left at the scene of the wreck. They were to be buried at Kracow, if the Russians thought of it.

We stayed the day at Kracow and were fed by the Polish Red Cross. We had two hot meals with coffee. We also had free bread and butter at the Polish YMCA, which was assisted by the Red Cross. We bathed there too and later John and I continued with the dressings for the injured who were still with us.

We were still sleeping in the station waiting room. When we went to sleep one night, we were fairly comfortable and each man had reasonable space. By morning the place was jammed with Russians who I'm sure would have slept on the ceiling if they could. It was stifling.

On 12th March, we visited the cinema in Kracow and saw Jack Hulbert in 'Kiss me Goodnight' and that evening, with only one extra truck (a cookhouse) added to the train, we moved out of Kracow. We travelled 12 miles and finished in a siding next

morning. Here, they hooked on two more trucks carrying more British ex-POW. These lads, thirty or more had worked in the Polish underground after their escape from German prison camps. The Russians then hooked up another truck as a sick bay, so John and I took back our old job.

We passed a town called Tarnow and were soon travelling through the Ukraine. The countryside was barren and devastated by fighting. The German dead still lay unburied.

We were kept in good humour by Lt Hirsch, a second Bob Hope and a grand chap. His quips continually brought fits of laughter.

We had a visit from the Russian Commandant, who advised us to close our trucks securely at night. Ukrainian bandits were in the area. These men would sweep down from the hills, looting, raping and killing in their raids. However, we were protected - most formidably! Three doped, irresponsible Russian soldiers were there to keep all the attackers at bay with rifles that must have been condemned after the Russian Revolution. This 'guard' did wonders for our morale in bandit country!

Dizzy was admitted on 15th March with an infected throat, caused when a burn had become infected. He looked thoroughly depressed. That day we passed the original Russo-Prussian border, the Curzon line, discarded in 1939.

The Russian railway system was incomprehensible. They would often shunt us into a siding and leave us there for minutes, maybe hours. Some of lads became reckless and went wandering from the train when it was held up in a siding. That way, many of them were left behind. We were all feeling uncomfortably 'lousy' for want of a bath but up to then we had no visits from the bandits.

We crossed the border into Russia on 16th March and passed through the town of Prymesel [*Przmysl*] during a fast run but during stops, our lads bartered their spare kit for bread and eggs which were able to get from local farmers. Some of them even tried to buy a white fur hat which a Cossack was wearing.

The land about was very poor with acres of crop less land and dilapidated farms. Here and there along the line, we saw dejected German prisoners on repairs to the railway. Unshaven and thin faced, they looked terribly weak. The Russian Commandant explained the Russian attitude to prisoners and claimed it was best. Starve them for weeks, and then the number of guards can be depleted, insisting all the time that the same amount of work is done. This way the Germans were being worked literally to death. However, we had seen the Germans treating the Russians in exactly the same way at Sagan, where ten Russians had died on average, every day.

We stayed a night at Lemberg [*Lviv*], a fairly large town. After the morning sick parade, Jack Holmes, the interpreter, John Jones and I went into town to exchange 100 Polish Zlotys for 100 Rubles. We bought 20 cigarettes and 20 eggs, two small loaves, candles and some tobacco at the town's market. Our black market trading supplies were by that time exhausted.

We found that another train had arrived by the time we returned to the station. It carried the rest of the Britons and others who had been left behind at Tschenskakowia [*Czestochowa*]. Before moving off that night, all of us who still had watches moved them two hours forward for Russian time. Travelling fast all night and the next day brought us quickly into Bessarabia [*Mostly modern day Moldova*]. Desolate and flat and inhabited by peasants living in no better conditions than some North African Arabs. At one stop we traded cotton reels for bread. Then we travelled on through Tarnapol [*Ternopil*] and then over the River Dniester about 280 kms from Kiev. The weather was warm and sunny, which allowed us to have the truck doors open.

Soon after leaving Berchilov [*Berdychiv*], about 400 kilometres from Odessa, we were attacked early at night by two Russians, who came into the truck and stole Lt Hirsch's trousers, coat and some more of his things. We called the guard and he chased the thieves but they got away after dropping the coat. This left our American friend trouserless. He cursed the 'barbarians' but we could not help ourselves from laughing. He presented such a ludicrous figure. A six foot four American, long and thin, covered only by his jacket. Joking about his appearance, it took four hours for us to settle down.

During the night we were intermittently visited by the guards, who smelled strongly of vodka. The next day, Lt Hirsch managed to get another pair of trousers. It was a tight fitting blue pair that reached no further than his knees. We laughed again at this lithe, long figure with ridiculously large boots sticking out of the skin tight pants! However, our 'Bob Hope' could take it and readily quipped back at all our cracks. The Lieutenant was glad of the trousers, despite the fun we poked at them, when we approached the River Bug. It was snowing and sleet was driving at the truck. We saw where the ice flows had washed away part of the wooden supports of the railway bridge. The Russians recruited every available scrap of labour in the village to repair it and women and children were bending over the task alongside men. After witnessing the way it was being mended and the labour used, we were not too happy about being the first to cross the repaired bridge. 'Ivan' gave us a while to dwell on it and we were shunted into a siding where we all slept until the early hours.

The following day, when we awoke was 20th March 1945, my 23rd birthday. I wondered if we should see it through. At 2am that morning our train rumbled on and we all crept out of bed and held our breath as we swayed along the final 100 yards of the bridge. But it was alright. The last truck swung over the last part of the bridge and there was no crash. We continued on our journey and reached Winneska [*Vinnytsia*], 300 kilometres from Odessa. We were given flour from a Russian Red Cross train. With it we made chapattis that evening.

That night we had another Russian visitor who tried to steal a pair of boots but we called in the Russian Commandant, who took the man outside the truck and beat him up. It was a most irregular but highly effective way of disciplining wayward subordinates. The man screamed the place down.

We made a complaint the next day about our truck. The base fixtures had three bolts in and from these two nuts were missing, so that it swayed from side to side at speed. All of us had been in one crash and we intended to take no chances so close

to our destination. As the Commandant had promised, Russian engineers repaired our truck at the next station and we all felt much easier.

To celebrate this and to celebrate one of the men's birthday, we had a blitz on lice, finding a delight in cracking the devils in our shirts. Luckily we were getting better food as we neared Odessa and scrounged six eggs each one day.

At one station an old man came up to us speaking perfect American. He said he had spent over thirty years in the United States and he and Lt Hirsch had a good chat about America and the places they each knew there.

We stopped again at a militaristic Russian school, where boys were on parade for dismissal. We heard them sing a national song before they were dismissed, just as we had heard Nazi kids sing in Germany.

That evening, one of the Russians came in as I was playing the harmonica. He tried to fit Russian words to my tunes, so I played a conga. He liked this apparently and threw his body around to the tune, whilst we tasted his vodka.

On 23rd March, we arrived at the port of Odessa to begin the last stage of our journey. The following morning, after a night in the train, we were marched through the town which had been devastated by fighting. We were taken into a delousing centre, where we were given clean underclothing and our outer clothes were disinfected. The organization there was the best we had so far encountered. British Red Cross workers were in Odessa and we expected that they had put some effort into this.

A Russian woman, who spoke very good English, led us to the buildings where other British and American prisoners were billeted. Lt Hirsch said goodbye and left by boat with his fellow countrymen the following day. French POW's moved out too and we took over their quarters. We were thirty men to a room, which was just comfortable and each of us had a well filled pailasse.

Representatives of the British Red Cross Commission in Odessa visited us on 24th March and we were registered by them and later they gave each of us a bar of chocolate and 30 cigarettes. One or two of the lads kept the atmosphere bright with tunes on the piano in a large downstairs hall. South Africans, Greeks and Palestinians, we heard were to embark next. All went well, except for the boredom of being confined to barracks and the unpalatable nature of the Russian bread.

Sick parade the next day was assisted by two Russian women doctors. One, quite a 'Mata Hari' darted sly looks at the Britons, in the manner of the best story book spies! However, we just smiled, for we had been told that we were to begin our sea journey home the next day, 26th March 1945, in the Duchess of Richmond, a British ship.

By 5 am each man was up, ready to go. We had breakfast and parade at 7.30 am for roll call in the cold air. Our column of men from the British billets formed up behind the Russian military band and we marched off the dock to the tunes of 'Colonel Bogey', 'Roll out the Barrel' and inevitably, the Red Army's 'Internationale'.

We saw the boat. She was a 22,000 tonner, majestic in comparison with the Russian derelicts alongside her. There was a sign 'Welcome Home' across the gangway and over this flew a Union Jack. Once aboard, they gave each man a washing bag from the Red Cross, which contained chocolate, cigarettes and handkerchiefs. Wherever one went, the Red Cross was there. The finest organization ever instituted to prevent people from Dying.

There were 800 British and Colonial troops aboard but we had plenty of space and comfortable hammocks. We ate in a special dining room, unlike the system for troopships. We had dinner and tea, British style.

More Britons, some from the hospital at Kracow, who had been flown to Odessa by the Russians, were taken aboard the next day. On the afternoon tide, we sailed out of Odessa and Russia. The Medical Officer had placed us on a light diet so that we could get used to normal food gradually. From what we were eating we felt the ship's 'normal' rations must be enormous.

A last look at Russia brought to mind that it was no country for adventure and romance, or for cavaliers and their ladies. Rather for tough, rough-necks that like living in sin and hardness.

The ship was not blacked out in the Black Sea. On our first night we received £2 and we visited the cinema to watch 'Carmen Miranda' and 'Don Ameche'. The next day we decided we would organise a concert to show the crew how we had amused ourselves during prison life. We got together a Rag-Time band and I volunteered to try and rake together a drum set. The ship's carpenter made some sticks, and out of a couple of tambourines I made a kettle drum. I used two more for a tom-tom effect. Our base drum was a dustbin, minus lid, damped by an army blanket.

We were soon issued with extra kit by the Red Cross and Quartermaster so that we would look presentable on arrival in England or Scotland, wherever it might be. In fact the crew ran a sweepstake among themselves on the port of disembarkation, for half of them seemed to be Scots and the other half from Liverpool.

In the evening of 28th March, our ship anchored in the Bay of Constantinople (Istanbul). It looked a beautiful port and we were anchored on the port side of a large harbour monument, similar to New York's Statue of Liberty. Earlier that day we had listened to BBC broadcasts of a few hundred British prisoners being taken off from the Port of Odessa and we hoped that the folks at home had heard it too. Our prison camp 'Charlie Higgins' had become a thing of the past.

Still at anchor in the sunlit bay, next day we continued with rehearsals for the show. It was being produced by an ex-Desert Rat, formerly a newspaper correspondent. We lazed in the afternoon sun and enjoyed a cup of real 'Sergeant Major's' tea, supplied at 2pm each afternoon by the Red Cross. The British Consul's wife brought us oranges on behalf of the British residents in Istanbul. A gesture we appreciated very much. That evening, still at anchor, we saw a Glen Miller film, 'Orchestra Wives'.

By 5.30am the next morning, it was up anchor and we were off again. Soon we were passing through the Dardanelles, where one of the ship's stewards pointed out to us the spot where the graves of World War one heroes were situated. This was marked by a plain monument on a hill. In the evening we enjoyed a 'Brains Trust' when the stars were Colonel Boeey of the Intelligence Corps and Wing Commander Tuck DSO, DFC and two bars, the famous fighter pilot. However, the surprise of the evening was Sergeant Armstrong, a Canadian captured at Dieppe who had been a newspaper reporter for the New York Times. He brought the audience to laughter with his wisecracks.

The seas became rough during the next day's voyage and I was one of those affected by it and the change of food. I had diarrhoea and spent the day in bed as we steamed past Crete towards the Italian coast. To take my mind of my complaint, I saw Frederick March and Alexis Smith in 'The Adventures of Mark Twain'.

Easter Sunday saw us all sunbathing on deck as the ship took us past Sicily, where we saw the snow-peaked Mount Etna, partly enveloped in mist. Through the Straits of Messina we saw the wrecks of sunken vessels. Small boats bearing shouting Italians and tramp steamers passed us. To the south we saw the sunny sea front of Messina. To the north, was the much less attractive town of Reggio on the Italian mainland.

On the morning of 4th April we sighted Naples. 'See Naples and Die' they say. However, few people knew that Die is just a small village just along the coast there. Naples had suffered quite a blitzing but the port authorities serviced it so that it could take big transporters. The inevitable Italian dock hawker came round the ship as we anchored and offered cheap jewellery. However, he could not compete with the canteen, for we had been paid that day. We were told to expect 2000 Canadian troops on board on their way home.

Every night a big school of 'Tombola' or 'Housey-Housey' went into session and the lads elected to donate 10% of all houses to the Red Cross, which we thought fair enough. The attendance was good and when we were not playing we sunbathed or read. I saw two more films, 'Battle of Britain' and 'Tunisian Victory'. We all enjoyed a performance by the Carlo Opera Company of Naples, who came aboard to sing for us.

Our show went on in the evening of 4th April and it went down very well. During it, we had a guest artists, Nervo and Knox of the London Palladiums Crazy Gang, Lee Patrick, Brian Reece and an exotic Torch Singer (really something for the boys) called Gabriel Brune. That night we finished up in the officer's lounge with bottles of Bass.

The Canadians we expected came aboard the following day and we had a programme by the Canadian Pioneer Band. Some British lads of Artillery Mountain units came aboard too. The ship became really crowded and there was no more sunbathing. One just could not find the space on deck! We gave another concert to the new lads and it went down as well as the previous one.

Next day we took on even more Canadians, troops and nurses, so that we were really a troopship. Our sleeping accommodation was still good and unaffected by newcomers. The NAAFI queue was nearly off the side of the ship next day.

We tried to sunbathe. The deck was littered by striped bodies and the words 'I beg your pardon' were often heard as some unfortunate chap had his feet trodden on or received a boot in his face. We repeated our concert for the third time, well supported by some ENSA artists. This included dance band leader Eddie Carrol playing 'In the Mood' on the piano.

After taking on more ex-POW's, none of whom we knew, we sailed out of the Bay of Naples on 7th April. The weather remained fine and the sea calm. We were glad of this as our ship was known as the 'Drunken Duchess' in rough weather. Our hammocks below decks became more comfortable as we got used to them. Next day she was 'drunken' in the waves, whipped up in a strong wind. We had to close the portholes as Ted Allen had an impromptu bath through his. The seas calmed towards the evening and with the moon twinkling on the water, we were reminded of pleasure cruises we had read about, in the Mediterranean - but some of the refinements were missing. We still, however, did not have to black out.

As the Duchess rolled on at a steady 16 knots, we held a draw which allowed 60 tickets to be drawn out of a hat of 10,000. These represented the minutes of an hour and the minute we passed Europa Point, was to be that of the winning ticket. I drew one of the lucky tickets, number 35 which meant 35 minutes past the hour. All the tickets drawn won £3. We passed the point at 0845 hrs and ticket 48 won £75 for an officer. The draw was split up, one third to the merchant navy, another third to the Red Cross and the remainder was prize money.

We anchored outside Gibraltar and could plainly see other troopships. The port presented a lovely sight in the evening and all lights were lit up. A Spanish liner sailed in with all its decks alight with coloured lamps. Searchlights from the Rock flashed intermittently. We played Housey-Housey for we couldn't sleep owing to the noise of depth charges. I was lucky and totalling up found that I had collected no less than £9 that day. All through the night, under cover of darkness, Spanish row boat traders came out to try and sell goods to us. It was warm and sultry and many of the lads slept on the open deck. Next day, the ladies of Gibraltar sent us oranges, as the ladies of Istanbul had done.

Before we set sail on 12th April, we had lifeboat drill, which was gruelling for those who had to row the life boats back after being lowered into the sea. We sailed out in convoy and that night, when I could not sleep because of the heat, I stayed out on deck and spoke to a Dutch Army man who had been captured at Nijmegen. He was going to England, on his way home.

As the Duchess rolled through the Atlantic, we amused ourselves with tombola, Brains Trust games and visits to the cinema. I saw John Mills and Noel Coward in 'In Which We Serve'. We missed Colonel Booley and Wing Commander Tuck in the Brains Trusts. They had flown home from Naples.

I won another ten shillings from a Scot who offered it on his team's chances in the England -v- Scotland soccer international on 14th April. England won 6-1!

There were about twelve ships in our convoy, which had been under black out since Gibraltar. It was hot below decks but the journey was lightened by another show from the Canadians. I was reading at the time a book called 'The Waterfront' which dealt with life in the Liverpool dock area. As I read, the lads discussed the chance of disembarking at Liverpool. Some of them thought it might be Scotland. The Scots and the lads from Liverpool had bets on this too. Wherever it was, we hoped to dock by 17th April.

When 17th April arrived, we knew it was definitely Scotland and it was then that we saw land for the first time. We sighted Scotland at 10am, sailed up the Clyde and dropped anchor at noon. We were told that we would disembark early the following morning and we whiled away the evening with tombola. What kit we had, we packed up that night ready to leave.

On schedule at 7am next day we boarded a waiting tender and landed at Greenock at 10am. The area Commander made a speech welcoming us home. We cheered him we cheered for being back in Britain and the biggest cheer of all went up for the Red Cross. We entrained half an hour later and the Scots took up the cheers, so that we were cheered all the way out of Scotland. We had tea at Newcastle and went on to Beaconsfield near Slough. Men who had been imprisoned by the enemy for five years remarked on the beauty of the countryside, green fields and the clean streets of the towns. It was such a wonderful feeling to be home again in the mother country.

We were put into comfortable Nissen huts at Beaconsfield and spent the next day in medical examinations, clothing issue and such and we received pay. The organization after some we had seen was super-efficient. If we were held up for a while, waiting our turns at X-ray apparatus, there was a cinema show in progress to keep us occupied.

On the 20th April, we celebrated together before going home on seven weeks leave. Ted, Dizzy and I and a few others decided to go to Slough, where we met a chap who took us around the town. He took us to his home for supper. We felt fine afterwards and rode back to camp by taxi. It tasted good to be English again.

I left for home at 10.30am from Euston and landed at Liverpool at 5pm. I finally arrived home to meet those who had waited patiently for me.

Here my story ends. Travels are exciting, interesting, adventurous and anxious but it is always nice to return to your loved ones at home, sweet home.

A V Tennuci

THE LATE 20180404 SSGT PETER CLARKE OBE MSc GPR



I am sure that Brian, Robert and Alan would not object to me publishing the recent death of a World War II Veteran along with the tribute dedicated to Colonel Bert in this article of the newsletter. Bert and Peter were POW and both were incarcerated in Stalag 11B in Fallingbommel about the same time. They may have known one another whilst in the POW Camp.

Peter Clarke enlisted into the RAMC in 1939 and subsequently joined the Glider Pilot Regiment (GPR). Peter Cole a former member of the RAMC who served as a Laboratory Technician and became an Army Helicopter Pilot forwarded me the obituary on the Late Peter Clarke which he received from AAC RHQ.:

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Peter Clarke OBE MSc at the age of 96 (5 May 21 – 3 Apr 18) following a period of illness.

Peter had enlisted for service in the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1939 whilst training as a solicitor. In June 1941 he was posted to RAF Manston, which prompted him to apply for training as a pilot. He transferred to the Glider Pilot Regiment and qualified on No 8 Course at No 4 Glider Training School in Kidlington. He later took part in Operation MARKET GARDEN as a Staff Sergeant Pilot flying in with F Squadron GPR from RAF Broadwell. Having successfully landed his glider he took his place with the troops on the ground. As the battle of Arnhem progressed he put his earlier training as a medic into use by setting up a First Aid Post close to the Hartenstein Hotel, where he administered physical and spiritual aid to the wounded before they were taken to a Casualty Clearing Station. As the battle drew to a close

he gave up his chance for evacuation in order to continue assist and protect the casualties in his care. After handing over his wounded to the care of the Germans he was taken to as Prisoner of War to a holding pen in Apeldoorn. From there he and two other members of the GPR escaped only to be recaptured a day later and returned to Apeldoorn for onward movement to Germany. They were initially incarcerated in Stalag 11B in Fallingbostal. As the war drew to a close he and his comrades were on one of the many long marches in atrocious conditions. After the war Peter returned to his legal calling. He remained a staunch supporter of the Glider Pilot Regiment Association and went on to become a key member of the governing Committee. He set up and managed the Glider Pilot Regiment Benevolent Fund and was in close liaison with RHQ AAC on many matters. He was a man of strong belief, much respected and well liked across the GPR and the AAC. His wife, Jean, predeceased him in 2016. Our thoughts are with his children, Gillian, David and Brenda and with his eight grandchildren

The funeral was held at Trinity Methodist Church, Conduit Road, Abingdon, OX14 1DB at 1200 on Friday 20th April 2018 and was followed by a private burial after the service.

The following links give detailed accounts of Peter which you will find very interesting:

http://www.pegasusarchive.org/arnhem/peter_clarke.htm

http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/features/9349090.Unlikely_hero_of_Arnhem/