

## Chapter Ten

### The Big March to Mooseburg

April 1st, April Fool's Day. First thing in the morning we started to hear a rumour that we would be moving out the next day. It came as a big surprise to all of us. We thought it was an April Fool's joke, but as the day went on we found out it wasn't a joke. We were to be packed up, ready to leave by first thing in the morning. We had to make something to carry our blanket, Red Cross parcel and whatever else we might want to take. Some of the guys had accumulated quite a few things but I had very little as I had not been in the camp that long.

First thing in the morning of April 2 we started off. There were a few camps and something like a thousand in each camp. I'm sure there were ten thousand of us. Now can you imagine this? We were all stretched out along the road, making a very long line. We were more or less told not to escape as the war was coming to an end. Food was getting very scarce and if we kept together we would have the Red Cross parcels as long as they lasted. The line of prisoners was miles long. Sometimes they would slow up at the

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front of the line for some reason or other and by the time it reached us, we would come to a stop. We wouldn't know if we were stopping for a rest, to eat, to sleep, or just slowing down.

When we stopped for the night we would have to find someplace to sleep. Generally we slept in the forest or at the side of the road. Some would build a fire to keep warm or cook and I can hear the yelling even now, "Put that fire out!" They were afraid of attracting aircraft that might start bombing us.

Before I left on this march I had made a little burner which was great to cook small things on and it didn't make much of a glow. It was also very fast so if we only stopped for a short time, I could heat up something very quickly. I made it out of a Klim milk can. I had a little square box coming out of the side with a little fan in it. With some dry twigs and sticks it would get going very fast. It was like a miniature forge that blacksmiths used. Some of my fellow prisoners never even knew how to find dry wood. I would dig it out of the bottom of a tree or find some in the bottom of an old log. I was always picking up little chips or bits of wood on the road and kept them in my pocket. I was often referred to as the "crazy boy scout", but I survived better than a lot of them. There were many who just kept moping around, feeling sorry for themselves. I tried to think of the whole march as kind of like a scout hike.

I think one of the worst things a fellow could get was dysentery. They would have to stop and go to the toilet very often. Then they would have to catch up with the column as weak as they were and getting

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weaker all the time. Often they would just have to give up and stay behind. The only thing we heard that would do any good for dysentery was to eat charcoal, so I ate lots of it. Good or bad, I don't know, but I never got the trots! There was a lot of dysentery around. I guess it was the food we were eating, or not eating, but I was very lucky and never got sick.

I was always on the lookout for things like dandelion leaves, so I could boil them up for greens. One time I had gathered a lot of them but I didn't have time to cook them. My Red Cross buddy (Two of us to a box) was carrying them for some reason. I lost track of him for a couple of days. The first thing I asked him after been reunited was, "Where are my dandelions?" He said, "I threw them away, I didn't know what to do with them!" I had a real urge to murder him. He was a real useless tit. I should have given up on him.

One day I scrounged an egg. Now when you have not had an egg for a long time you really treasure it. I was looking forward to a nice soft boiled egg. He decided to help me because I did most of the cooking, so he was going to cook my egg. Good God! he hard-boiled it! What a disappointment! I had been looking forward to it for days. He couldn't see anything wrong with what he did! The urge to kill.

The German farmers were very good to us. They would come out to the road with buckets of milk and give us each a cup full. The guards would get angry and chase them away. They would then go back to the end of the line and start giving it out again. I was bitter towards the German SS and the Gestapo, but I

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had no bad feelings for the Wermacht ( that is, the ordinary soldier), the farmers and other civilians.

We received almost no food from the German guards. We would barter food from farmers and people in small towns, using cigarettes to barter with. Soap was also very good. We prized everything in those Red Cross parcels. Moreover sometimes we would steal food out of the farmyards or anywhere we found it. When you are hungry, you do a lot of things you wouldn't normally do.

One day we stopped for a couple of hours for some unknown reason. I saw a big mill that was run by water power. The farmer had used it to grind wheat into flour. I swept up wheat from all around the place, in the corners etc. I brushed it clean and put it in the big hopper. Then I climbed up on the big wheel and rode it down. It took me a while but I wasn't in a hurry, although I had to be very quiet, as it was close to the farm house. I eventually made some flour. I took it back to where we were camping and decided to make some pancakes. I added powdered milk and other odds and ends saved, including a couple of vitamin pills as I figured they would work like baking powder. They turned out very good. Now you have to remember we were on the hungry side and had not had pancakes for a long time, so the pancakes may not have been quite as good as I thought they were at the time.

One horrible thing that happened to us as we walked along were the American fighter bombers. They loved to shoot at anything that moved. They would see us all on the road and would take it for

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granted that we were German soldiers on the move. It was horrible to have them come down and machine gun us. They were shooting with 9mm guns or 20mm cannons which made a hell of a bang. It was a horrible feeling! To see the planes fly over was fine, but then when you heard them starting to dive, you knew they were coming after you. I always tried to keep a ditch in view; it gave me a little comfort. If those big guns hit a two foot tree they would knock it all to hell. We would get behind a tiny six inch tree and think we were safe. When I was young, I had read stories about how the ostrich would put his head in a hole. One day, when we were bombed by those fighter bombers, four prisoners were killed and four wounded. That was horrible! Some of these fellows had been prisoners from a few months to a few years. To get killed so close to the end of the war, and by our own fighters! Another group were hit a lot harder. There were twenty or so killed or injured. One day, we quickly wrote a big sign “POW” on the field using toilet paper, but it didn’t help. They ignored it or didn’t believe it.

We were almost bombed by a Kittyhawk squadron one day. They had the big hawk painted bright colours on the nose of the plane. They came right down and took a look at us. They were a squadron made up of black pilots (Tuskegee Squadron). We could see them with a big grin on their faces. They dipped their wings and flew off. We were not bombed after that, so I guess they reported back that we were POWs on the move.

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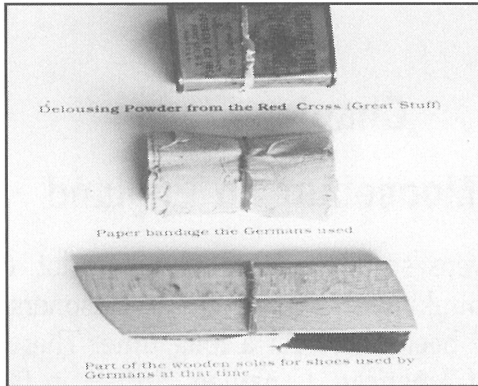
The Red Cross seemed to be well organised. Every two weeks, wherever we were, they found us. We would see their big white trucks with the big red crosses on them. As I said, we were all in pairs and got one parcel between us, every two weeks. The American parcels were my favourite as they had US cigarettes in them and more of them. English cigarettes weren't as good, less popular, and we got fewer of them.

Coming into the middle of April, we enjoyed some very nice days. Spring was on its way and as usual was a beautiful time of the year. With the weather so nice summer seemed nice to look forward to. During some of those nice Spring days one could almost forget the war.

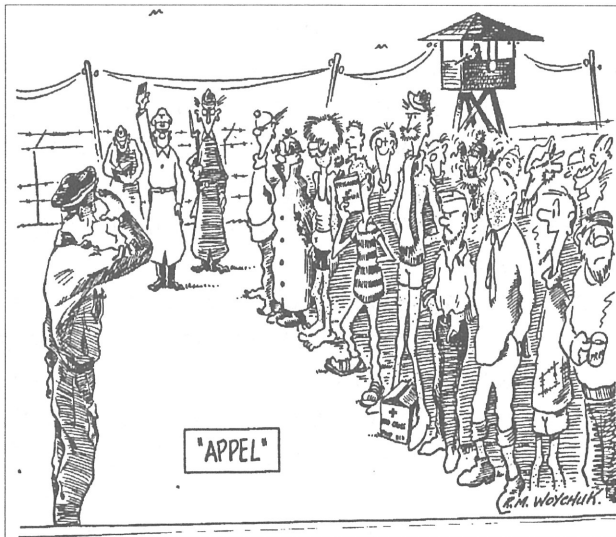
In sixteen days we received only a bowl of soup, a couple of pounds of potatoes and 1-1/2 loaves of bread from the Germans. So it was either scrounge food, barter for it, or depend on the Red Cross. The Germans didn't have food supplies anymore and the guards themselves didn't have much food at all, and they didn't have the Red Cross parcels.

After sixteen days, during which we walked 120 kilometres, we came to a very large prison camp, much bigger than any I had seen so far. It was called Mooseburg #7A POW camp. Again, I figured this was to be my last stop.

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*Fig.10a German soles for shoes and paper bandage plus our delousing powder*



*Fig. 10a Roll Called in German "Appel"*