

Chapter Eleven

Mooseburg to England

We were scattered throughout a lot of very crowded bunkhouses. Some of the prisoners in the camp had been there for a long time. There was a mixture of American, Canadian, British, in fact prisoners from all of the Allied forces, including the army, air force and navy. There was also a very large camp of Russian prisoners next door.

There were a hundred of us in each hut. The bunks were very large and would accommodate two people wide, two people in length and were in three tiers. That meant twelve people slept in each section. They were very wobbly, being made out of wood and built three high, but also because people had taken some of the cross braces off to burn in the stove for heat or cooking.

The Russians were in a camp next door to us. Their living conditions were very sad and they only had sacks and rags for clothes. They were very thin, weak and gaunt looking, just like the Jewish people in the concentration camps. The war between the Russians and Germans was very different to the war between the Western Allies and the Germans the big difference being that the Russians didn't observe the Geneva Convention. We weren't doing too badly

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compared to them. The Germans treated the Russians horribly and the Russians treated their German prisoners just as badly. When the Germans advanced east across Russia, they plundered, raped and murdered millions of Russians. So when the Russians came back west, they did the same thing to the Germans.

The end of the war was now getting nearer. We could hear the heavy guns as they were very close. The day before General Patton arrived, the Germans gave the camp up and turned it over to the senior officers of the POWs. Those officers had to keep some kind of order, as the war wasn't over yet and there were still lots of SS around who were not giving up until the very end.

On April 28th General Patton and his soldiers came in the front gate. What a great feeling to be free at last! I'll never forget an American soldier throwing me a loaf of white bread. I was sure it was angel food cake. It was delicious after a diet of black German sourdough bread.

The Germans all left the camp, which was then organised by the senior allied officers who were in the camp. There had to be some sort of organisation in the camp to give out our Red Cross parcels and to keep things in order. The American Army didn't want us running all over the place as they had a war to finish. There was still another week or so of tough fighting. It wasn't a big problem to get wood to cook with now; we just broke pieces off the huts. We didn't care what they looked like as we had no intention of being there long. We were all going home.

Mooseburg and Return to England

I headed out one day with a group of Russians, looking for food. There was a pig farm close by and we started to chase this pig. We ran and we ran until the pig dropped. My Russian companions started cutting it up and I was right in there with them, but, I couldn't speak Russian and there were a lot of them so I only got the head and neck. I wasn't complaining, as there was still a lot of eating in the neck and head.

I was cooking for a couple of other guys who spent most of their time moping around. We had roast pork, (that is, pork cooked on the end of a stick on a open fire,) fried pork, (sort of fried in a pan) and boiled pork. I also found a chicken pen but unfortunately I was too late to get any of them. However, I kept looking and eventually found a couple of eggs and a few vegetables, carrots and beets, that were really great. We had powdered skim milk in our Red Cross parcels and I was told that it would whip if one worked long enough. I beat it in a can with my spoon for about an hour, and although it never really whipped, with a little imagination it tasted good. One day when I was out looking for food, I came across a group of Americans soldiers who gave me a gallon of corned beef hash. I sat down and started to eat it. I ate and ate until I was sick, but what a wonderful feeling to be really full and still have food left over! They started transporting us back to England, but it was a very big job with approximately 40,000 of us to move. We were sorted into our different camps and they decided to have a big raffle to see who got out first, second, and third. A large camp of East Indians won and were the first to leave.

"THE LONG RETURN"

R133074
STALAG VII A
MOOSEBURG
GERMANY
May 2

Dear Mom & Pop
Planning to be home
in a couple of days
I will write you a
letter to let you know
my address with
Police station in
town and I will
phone them for it.
I expect 6 weeks leave
& in good health

Love Bob

my darling Ginger
I expect to be back
in a few days getting
6 weeks leave & hope
to plan to get some
and we will have
one long honeymoon
Loving you more
every day and darling
I hope I can find where
you are the first day

Your ever loving husband
Bob
XXXXXX

Fig.11a A letter written May 2nd on toilet paper.
I wrote Ginger and her Mom. They received this
letter weeks after my return

Mooseburg and Return to England

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

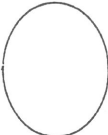
 <small>(SENDER'S STAMP)</small>	TO: <u>MRS RE PORTER</u> <u>18 LLWYN HELYG</u> <u>NANTYBWCH</u> <u>TAEDEGAR MON</u> <u>WALES ENG</u>	FROM: <u>SGT PORTER RE</u> <u>R133074 RCAF</u> <u>STALAG VII A</u>
	SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2	(Sender's complete address above)
	MAY 2.	
	<p> My darling wife Ginger It has been a long time darling but our time is coming soon. He got & liberated a couple of days ago and expect to be leaving for Eng in 4 or 5 days so darling I should be seeing you in a week. If you have been moved leave your address at Police station at Tredign and I will phone there for it I am expecting 6 weeks leave darling so expect you will be able to get the same and we will have our long honeymoon and darling after this last year I am ready for one glorious time. I wrote you another letter for one of the fellows to mail so you are sure to get one of them. We will spend our first couple of days in London for I have a few things to get and do. Well darling not much more till I see you in 10 days or so your ever loving husband Bob XXXX </p>	
	HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?	REPLY BY V-MAIL

Fig. 11b Another letter I wrote to Ginger, May 2, 1945 through the Red Cross "V Mail." We received it a month after coming home

"THE LONG RETURN"

AIR MINISTRY,

73-77, Oxford Street, London, W.I.

7th May 1945.



CAN/ Re 133074/P.4/CAS/C.4.

Dear Mrs. Porter,

Further to my letter of the 21st December, 1944, I wish to inform you that further information has been received concerning your husband, Flight Sergeant Robert Edward Porter, but which, unfortunately, does not establish whether he is now alive.

A report has been received to the effect that your husband was with a party of Allied servicemen who were making their way back to Allied territory on the night of the 2nd /3rd January 1945. The party was subjected to considerable fire by the Germans; at this point the party was separated and your husband and others were last seen running across the ice in a badly flooded area.

A further report has reached us which states that two members of the party were killed. No further information has been received concerning your husband, and in view of the lapse of time, grave consideration must be given to the possibility that he may have lost his life at that time.

You may be assured that immediately upon receipt of further news, you will be informed.

Please accept my deepest sympathy with you during this trying time.

Yours sincerely,

E J Figg J/L

/s/ (J S. Harris), Wing Commander for Air
Officer Commanding in chief,
R.C.A.F. Overseas.

Mrs. R.E. Porter
18, Lewyn Helyg
Nantybawch
Tredgar, Mon.

Fig.11c May 7th. (A copy of a Letter) my wife received, grave consideration that I may have lost my life. Has been re-typed for clarity

Mooseburg and Return to England

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

OTTAWA, Canada, 10th May, 1945.
FILE NO: R.133074 (R.O. 4)

BOMBER MAIL

Canadian Casualty Branch,
Air Ministry,
P.4 Cas (Can),
73-77 Oxford Street,
LONDON, W.1, England.



CAN/R133074 Flight Sergeant PORTER, R.E.

1. It is requested, please, that no steps whatever be taken to initiate Presumption of Death action on Flight Sergeant Porter, without these Headquarters being first advised of your intention to take such action.



(T.K. McDougall),
Group Captain,
for Chief of the Air, Staff.

Fig.11d Letter from RCAF to Canadian Casualty Branch. No steps to be taken on presumption of my death

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ADDRESS REPLY TO:
THE SECRETARY,
DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE FOR A.R.
OTTAWA, ONTARIO.



OUR FILE R.133074 (R.O. 4)

REF. YOUR

DATED

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

AIR MAIL

OTTAWA, Canada, 10th May, 1945.

Mr. C.A. Porter,
3406 Imperial Street,
New Westminster, B.C.

Dear Mr. Porter:

Further to our letter of March 16th, a report has now been received which, although containing nothing definite concerning the present whereabouts or fate of your son most unfortunately indicates that he may have lost his life.

This report states that your son was one of a party of thirteen allied service men who were evading and were making their way back to liberated territory in Holland on the night of January 2nd. The party was subjected to considerable fire by the Germans and they were forced to separate. While some took cover, your son and some of the others moved off, and it is reported that your son was shot when they attempted to escape across the ice in a badly-flooded area, while under fire from three German machine gun posts. Your son was dressed in civilian clothes at that time but was wearing his identification disc. He and the others with him were not seen again.

The above information was obtained from members of the party who took cover and did not attempt to cross the ice. You will understand, of course, that there is no official confirmation that your son was shot. However, two other Royal Canadian Air Force personnel who were believed to be with your son when the attempt was made to cross the ice, have now been reported by the Germans through the International Red Cross at Geneva to have lost their lives. As no further information has been received concerning your son, and in view of the above report and the time which has elapsed, it unhappily appears that he also may have lost his life on the night of January 2nd.

--- 2 ---

R.C.A.F. G. 328
3539-1-4 (373)
11-Q 356-G-353

Fig.11e Page 1 of 2 pages May 10th letter to my Mother from RCAF, the Day before Mother's Day. A very sad letter

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--- 2 ---

Pending confirmation of the above report, Air Ministry advises that your son is still being considered as "missing".


I wish to assure you that no effort will be spared in an endeavour to locate the whereabouts of your son or ascertain his fate. There is a Royal Air Force and Dominion Air Force Missing Research and Enquiry Service now in operation in Europe whose function it is to obtain as complete information as possible on all personnel believed to be casualties in territories which were occupied by the Germans and are now liberated and on whom full particulars have not yet been received. It is hoped that through this Service additional information will be obtained. Please be sure that immediately any further news is received it will be communicated to you at once.

I very deeply regret to have to pass on to you a report with information of such a nature, especially when it is still indefinite, but felt sure that you would wish to have any information received by this Department concerning your son.

I trust that the knowledge that your son, together with others of his high calibre, was willing to offer his life as his contribution to ensure a lasting peace which we hope the Allied Victory in Europe will result in, will give you courage and sustain you during this period of uncertainty and sorrow.

May I offer you my most sincere sympathy at this time of anxious waiting.

Yours sincerely,


R.C.A.F. Casualty Officer,
for Chief of the Air Staff.

**Fig.11f Page 2 of 2 May 10th letter to my mother
the day before Mothers' Day**

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I was in the fourth or fifth bunch to leave. We were very lucky to have been liberated by the US army. The POWs who were liberated by the Russians didn't have it nearly as good. The only change that occurred when the Russians liberated a camp was that German guards were exchanged with Russian guards. Furthermore, the Russians weren't going to liberate Allied prisoners until the Russian prisoners were sent back to Russia. The big problem was that all our prisoners wanted to go home while the Russians didn't want to go back to Russia. Russian POWs weren't treated very well when they got back home (many ended up in Siberia,) so they wanted to stay in the west. In the end, Allied prisoners had to escape from the Russians.

By May the 7th the war was pretty well over for us but it wasn't officially over until May 8th. On the night of May 7th we had a huge fire in the front of the camp. We burned everything we could get our hands on: shutters from the windows, tables, beds, so-called mattresses made from straw, doors, wagons and anything we could carry.

On May the 8th it was our turn to head out. We walked about 20 kilometres to an airfield called Regensberge. I never got on a plane that day, but met a crew who were taking guys back in Lancaster bombers. I asked them to radio down to Ginger when they were flying over Stratford-on-Avon OTU, that I was on my way home. They never did or they did, but no one passed the message on, because Ginger never got it. I had been away for almost a year now and still didn't know if anyone knew that I had survived or not. Be-

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fore nightfall they told us we were not going to leave that day. I knew there was a small town, called Lan-shot, not far away, so I decided to see if I could find a comfortable place to sleep. The town was almost empty. I guess the people left when the fighting was going on. I found an apartment that was empty with a bed in it, and there I spent the night.

I flew out of Germany on May the 10th. What a great feeling to be heading for England! We didn't know where we were going. We thought we were going straight to England but we only got as far as Rheims, in France, where we landed near a very big US army camp. Immediately upon landing, we were made to form two line-ups: lousy prisoners this way, non-lousy ones that way. A lot of us were lousy. They then used big hoses to blow de-lousing powder up your pant legs, down the front of your pants, and up your shirt. They were very thorough, but it was good! Then we had a full turkey dinner with all the trimmings, with fresh beans, and peaches for desert. It was great! Most of us had two helpings but really could not eat it all as our stomachs had shrunk. It was kind of nice, as the food was served by German POWs. I think they knew we were kind of temperamental as we were ex-POW and some of us weren't very nice to them.

Later that night we were in the air again, flying to England. We landed in a RAF station in southern England and I tried to phone Ginger. However, as it was war-time, I couldn't get the telephone number of the station she was at, and her parents didn't have a phone. I called the police in her town and left a mes-

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sage for her father that I would call back the next day. At the station they fed us bacon and eggs, all we wanted. They went all out for us. They called out over the intercom inviting the WAF'S to come to the mess for a party with a bunch of POWs, saying they wouldn't have to work the next day. We had a great party! It didn't take much beer to get us high. I can remember sitting in the middle of the floor, all my odds and ends spread out around me, with a big smile on my face. We were scattered all over the base to sleep, but I slept right in the mess. I wanted to be close to the kitchen, (I wasn't dumb.) Next day, we were off to Bournemouth, the RCAF'S main transfer centre. We were given a lunch, a train ticket, but no money and off we went again. I bummed a shilling off a stranger on the street to phone Ginger's father again. I told them I was an ex-POW and trying to get in touch with my wife. I phoned the police station again to see if my father-in-law was there. I never knew there were two Tredegars, which was the town she was from. This time I phoned Old Tredegar. The other time I had phoned New Tredegar, which was why I still hadn't found him. My money was gone and my train was coming, so off I went. The next time we stopped, I did it all over again and finally spoke to him. He had been running back and forth from one police station to the other. He finally got hold of Ginger up at her OTU camp to let her know I was alive, well, and back in England. This is when I found out that none of them had known that I was alive. In fact they were quite sure I was dead. It was a shock to all of them ! The first thing I did when I got to Bourne-

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mouth was to send a telegram to my mother to tell her I was safe.

The day before Mother's Day she had received a letter from Ottawa saying that they had given up hope; on Mother's Day she received my telegram saying that I had arrived safely in England. This was the first news they had heard from me in eleven months. The day after Mother's Day the RCAF phoned my mother to tell her to disregard the last letter. Then they sent her another telegram. I talked to Ginger on the phone and we started to make arrangements to get together. I was told I had to stay in Bournemouth for a week of interrogations of a sort. They wanted to know where I had been for the last year. They told me what had happened to my crew and where they were buried. I found out that Bill Gardiner was buried in an unmarked grave, as nobody could recognise his body and didn't know if it was him or me. The airforce then got in touch with his wife Dorothy to let her know that it was his body and not mine. Very tough on his family, but very lucky for me and mine. I had a interview with a reporter from Vancouver who was writing for the "The Maple Leaf", an airforce paper.

Ginger came down to Bournemouth as soon as she could get away. They had known on the airforce station she was on that I had been missing so there was no problem with her getting leave. As soon as my couple of week was up and after they had finished checking me over, I was kept on a diet until my stomach got back in order, Ginger and I went up to London. I was very displeased with headquarters in

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London. Normally when someone was shot down they automatically got a commission or a raise in rank, but as no one knew where I was or whether I was still living; my file was just put on the shelf and left there. It wasn't only the rank, but the pay that went with it that I had lost. They couldn't do anything in Bournemouth because all of this was done in London. Consequently I was very mad. I would not wear my hat or my rank on my shoulders. If service police stopped me, I just told them I was an ex-POW who had just got back and they wouldn't say anything.

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J 10071

George the Sixth, by the Grace of God
*of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas King
 Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India &c.*

To Our Trusty and well beloved Robert Edward Porter
 We having referred Trust and Confidence in your Loyalty, Courage and good Conduct, do by these
 Our Letters Underwrite, and Appoint you, to be an Officer in Our Royal Garrison in the Town of New
 Dominion of Canada from the 1st day of May 1945

Dilect Officer we in great other Pleas as We may from time to time to require, do hereby allow to
 promote except you to of which a notification will be made, in the Governor's Office, or in such
 other manner as may be the thing being to be made by, in Council, and you are in such manner and
 on such occasions as may be presented, by the Governor, and well observing, both the superior Officers
 and other ranks, serving under you, and we your best endeavours to keep them in good Order, and
 Discipline, And We do hereby Command them, to Obey you, as their superior Officer, and you to
 observe and follow such Orders, and Directions as from time to time you shall receive from Us, or
 any your superior Officer, in pursuance of the Trust, do hereby re-appoint you.

*H. His Majesty's Governor, General of Our Dominion of Canada
 authorized to sign and seal at Our Government House in the City of Ottawa
 the 10th day of December, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand
 Nine Hundred and Forty five and in the 14th
 Day of December, The Governor, General
 Ad. P. ... as a Substitute for
 Minister of National Defence*

Dilect Officer
 Robert Edward Porter
 Royal Canadian Air Force
 Reserve - Special Section

Fig. 11 g I received my Commission dated May 10th 1945

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<table border="1"> <tr><th colspan="2">CLASS OF SERVICE</th></tr> <tr><td>Full Rate</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Day Letter</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Night Message</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Night Letter</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Evening and Sunday Message</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p><small>Please mark as it appears the class of service desired.</small></p>	CLASS OF SERVICE		Full Rate		Day Letter		Night Message		Night Letter		Evening and Sunday Message		<h1>CANADIAN PACIFIC TELEGRAPHS</h1> <p>World Wide Communications</p> <p><small>W.D. REIL</small></p>	<table border="1"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">CHECK</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">TIME FILED</td></tr> </table>	CHECK	TIME FILED
CLASS OF SERVICE																
Full Rate																
Day Letter																
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Night Letter																
Evening and Sunday Message																
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<p><small>Send the following message, subject to the conditions on the back thereof, which are hereby agreed to.</small></p>																
		<p>40 VRY MAR May 13/45 19__</p> <p>SANS ORIGINE</p>														
<p>Chas. A. Porter 3406 Imperial Street New Westminster, B.C.</p>																
<p>Back in England. Good and Healthy. Love.</p>																
<p>Bob Porter</p>																
<p>May 13th: Telegram from me</p>																

Fig.11h Mother's Day morning, my mother received this telegram from me. The first she had heard from me in almost a year

They had to be practical. What could they do to someone who had been a POW for a year? We had a lot of trouble getting a hotel room and had to go away from the centre of London, as all of the hotels were full. I found out later that most of them had been reserved for ex-POWs but no one told us that. I got Ginger settled in the hotel room. They were real snotty to us. A WAF with a Canadian shacking up and saying we were man and wife! We left our wed-

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ding picture on the dresser and went out for a while, knowing they would go into our room.

They were sure different when we got back. What a difference a little piece of paper such as a wedding certificate or a wedding picture makes! I headed down to headquarters. The buses were very cheap and it only cost me one tuppence to get there. The bus seemed to go straight to downtown London, no problem. When I arrived at headquarters, they didn't give me any problems. I was given my WO1 (warrant officer one) rank right away and papers put through for my commission, but they would not back-date it to when I got shot down. They claimed it couldn't be back-dated that long so I lost a year of back pay. They gave me a clothing allowance and some clothes' ration coupons to buy my new uniform as a WO1. I came out of headquarters feeling much better but maybe I came out a different door because everything looked different. I had in my mind to go straight up the main street but all the streets looked the same and none went straight. I had not written down the name of the hotel and I didn't have a clue where I should go. Back to square one! I took the name and address of the theatres, found a cab and told him my problem. So we started to drive from one theatre to another. My luck wasn't too good; we didn't hit the right theatre until the third try. It cost me tuppence to get to headquarters and almost two pounds to get back to my hotel. Ginger and I saw a bunch of shows and did lots of talking, trying to catch up on what had happened in the last year. When I was in London, I wrote my mother a long letter As she had not heard

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from me for almost a year there was a lot to tell her. This was a nineteen page letter showing my feelings as they were then. I could not say much about my time in Holland as the war was not fully over. The return address was my wife's home in South Wales. This was a nineteen page letter when I wrote it in longhand. After my mother had given it to everybody to read and sent it all over, it was almost totally worn out.

18 llwyn Helyg Nantybwh

Tredegar Mon. S. Wales

May 15, 1945

Dear Mom,

I wrote an airmail from this morning, but could not write very much, on it, as so much has happen in the last year. So, I hope, I will get to make this a long one and then telephone you.

That night, we were going to the Ruhr. Which was really a hot target, we were chased by fighters, once going in and once going out of the target. We dropped our bombs and almost home safe and sound we could see the English channel on the Radar and that always looked good. But over Holland, there was a lot of flack around all the way back from the target. We must have been hit in the oxygen lines because our Aircraft was on fire in the fuselage. I was helping Gardy, the navigator with the Radar. I grabbed a fire extinguisher, and headed back to the fuselage. It had started too fast and grown to big, to put out. It was a mass of flames, by this time Bill our pilot could see it and new it was hopeless and told us to bail out. Our English Engineer opened the escape hatch and got it jammed. Before doing so, he took off his oxygen. So flying at 22,000 feet, he passed out. I tried to get down and get him out of the way, but while doing so, the gas tanks blew up. Last I remember, the fire was all around us. We were being thrown from one side of the aircraft, to the other. I more or less said my prayers then, said good-bye to Ginger, and you and that was all until I came conscious at about 7000 feet. I figured because, I wouldn't have got enough oxygen,

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until 10,000 feet. I had my parachute on, but it was not opened. So, I felt on my chest for my shoot and it was not there.

That was scary, I felt a tug on my shoulder, my shoot had come unhooked and was above my head I had enough sense to reach up and pull the ripe cord and open it. I slowed down very quick. I could see our aircraft miles away, burning. I landed safely, in a tree; that was the last I saw of all my crew.

I found out later that "Bill Smith", my pilot and "Sid Wilson" rear gunner, were killed and buried at Amersfoort. I will never forgive the Engineer, for getting the escape hatch jammed which I figure, got those two killed, according to one of your letters you had sent Ginger "Glen Taylor" my mid-upper gunner was killed. The other three, I know nothing about, except what Jack Friday wrote from a "P.O.W. camp, that I was not so lucky as he figured I was dead. I think, he must have seen one of my crew. I would sure love to meet them again. They were a swell bunch. I had a lot of my hair burned, my eyebrows, and my hands a little. A large bang on my arm, a couple on each leg and a knock on the knee, but I was feeling good enough to walk.

It was a terrible night, raining and blowing, which I guess, helped me get away from the vicinity of my parachute, and where I landed. Later the next day, I made friends in Holland and they really treated me swell.

They hid me, fed me, clothed me, gave cigars and all, I even had a tailor make me a suit for my birthday, a barber came around to the house. I had it good, and really swell. I will never forget the people I lived with in Holland. When one comes to think of all they did for me. And if they had of been caught by the Germans his wife and two kids, would have been shot.

I sent a couple of letters out, when I was in Holland. I was pretty sure, you would have known all about me. I guess, they never got all the way through. There's a lot that happened from June, until January 03, but it is best, I think, not to write it in here as the war is not yet over and may endanger someone life in Holland, but I will be able to tell you all about it, when I get back.

On January 02, we started our escape through the lines to freedom. It might have been best for me to have

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stayed in Holland, until the end, but seven months is a long time, to sit around and never know for sure if you knew I was there. The possibility of being posted as dead, after six months.

We had crossed, the German line with very little trouble and was going South near Opheusden and the Germans, opened fire on us. The country had been all flooded and frozen. Some of the ice, would hold us, some would not, the water was from one inch to two or three feet. We started our mad run and all got separated. I was there with a Army Sergeant Major Wilf Berry and a Captain Roger Schjelderup from near Vancouver. The Germans would shoot flares at us, then machine gun us. We were running in water, on ice, or breaking ice half swimming. Where ever we were when the flares came, we hit the ground or the water or the ice. I lost my shoes on the ice and I was bare footed all night. My feet were sure cold, but lucky not frozen, after four hours of running and being chased.

Wilf and I hid up in a little shack until daylight. I never in my life, spent such a cold night. Our clothes practically frozen on us. The Sergeant Major Wilf Berry, had a bullet in his arm. We were fed up and ready to give in at daylight. Very luckily I had some dry tobacco in a tin, in my inside pocket. I took the cotton batten out and to get a light. I had a couple of frozen apples and our moral was up 50%.

We were ready then, to keep fighting and try to get back. Then, we heard the British guns and rifles fire and we knew, they were close. In fact, about a kilometre away but we found we were on almost an island. As it had gotten warmer the ice melted, only one way off and we headed that way hoping it was to the English lines but it wasn't, it was in to the Germans lines. So we were taken prisoners, which was sure "hell" after waiting seven months to get back and get caught a kilometre away, that is bad luck. The Germans who captured us treated us pretty good but we were taken to jail near "Arnhem ", for interrogation.

We wore civilian clothes, and had a sten gun, with us. The Germans took a very dim view of this and we knew they could have legally shot us. We don't knew why, they never!

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But we were taken to Dodewaard and then to Felp, and were under the German Army Secrete Police, they were not so nice and very rough. We were there for about three weeks, in solitaire on a cup of soup and piece a bread per day, plus a cup of German ersatz coffee. We were interrogated for hours at a time, day or night. They were trying to find out which Dutch people had hid us and helped us. If we had told a dozen or so we would have been shot and the links broken. We told nothing and said: they could shoot us. They used to get so damned mad at us.

I had written a letter to Ginger to be sent through you, a week before I left, and the Germans had got it. I had written on rice paper and then rolled it up very tight. We took a comb and drilled a hole in it and put the note in the comb. A courier going through the line was taking it and he must have got caught, God knows what happened to him. This letter saying: "I had lived with this Captain Roger Schjelderup" from Courtney also one of his letter to his Mother. I had always told the Germans I had lived alone in a barn and knew no one, he jumped up, called me a damn liar and kicked me out of the room, a couple of hours later, he called me back, asked me: "Was I ready to tell the truth?". I said: "yes". He asked a few questions, including; had I written a letter? and had I lived alone? I told him I wrote none and lived alone. He sat down with on sarcastic smile. Passed me the letter that I had written, asked me: "Did I know Roger Schjelderup". It was sure a blow because it blew all my story. He was tired, physically kicked me out of the office, and back to my cell, I had time to make up a new story including Roger.

Dutch men were being beaten in the next room. They never badly tortured us, but we were expecting it any day!

When I lost my shoes, the Germans would only give me an old pair of wooden clogs which I had to learn to walk with in a hurry. Then we were sent up to another prison in Utrecht: Which we again were put alone into a cell and gave a cup of coffee, for breakfast, a cup of watery soup for lunch and piece of bread for supper. The days were really long and we got so damned hungry. Just sitting there, day and night, no smoke, just thinking, after three weeks, we were sent to another concentration

"THE LONG RETURN"

prison in Germany. We know all hopes of escape were gone, once we were out of Holland.

We only had one chance, but the lock jammed and we couldn't get it opened at the end. In the morning, the Germans tried to open the door and couldn't, so they knew, we had tried and put double locks, and a few more guards on us. This prison, in Germany, was worse, a cement cell, with cement floor and no heat. Our breath would condense on the ceiling and get about five or six large drops of water down a minute. We slept on the floor with no blanket. These were, all political prison, run by "SS." and "Gestapo". The way they treat the political prisoners is terrible and not propoganda. I have seen them, so I know.

The food here, was the same. I got very thin, every time I stood up, I had to hang on to something or I would pass out. Once they made me face the wall one afternoon and I passed out after about seven minutes of it. Smoking, we missed a lot. We would go so slow as to pick up a German cigarette butt, 1/2" long, was really a good one and five or six of us, smoke it. A person loses a lot of self respect and pride in times like that. I had a bath on December 23 and clean clothes. The Germans would not give us soap, towels or nothing to wash with. I was beginning to get high by this time.

It was March tenth, I got my bath and clean clothes. I literally stunk and that is not a word of a lie. When I wanted to go to sleep, I would put my nose down the front of my sweater. I just went off in a dream. (I am now having at least one bath a day) it sure is good. We were almost three weeks, in this first prison in Germany.

We then left for a collection type of camp, which thank God, was a P.O.W. camp and not a political prison camp which was "hell". We were then classed as "P.O.W. all the time before, we were always referred to as spies and terrorists. We knew we were safe, at least not talking about being shot, or beat up and no more solitary confinement. We got a few smokes there, and found the food much better. Instead of having one in a cell, we had seven or eight which I don't know which is worse. But treatment in general improved. Stayed here a week and

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got put with the Air force. I was sure sorry to loose the army types which I had been with.

We went up to "Muenster" where I stayed there one night and there wasn't a building standing in the whole place, not a wall, not a door, just a square mile or so of rubble. That is the German City of today, nothing left." Nuremberg, Frankfurt" and many others I saw were like that. The people were very bitter naturally. Our guards, then were not to keep us from escaping but keep the people away from us. We sure kept close to the guards. I never let them out of my sight.

We, then went to Frankfort by box car which was no fun because our aircraft were bombing and shooting the trains and rail-yards up all the time. I never got hit, but I know many of those that did.

At Frankfurt, I was interrogated again and left a couple of days later, for a place call " Wetslow " and to me, it was wonderful, that was about middle of March. I had my first wash, a real hot shower, got clean clothes, a tooth brush, a wonderful thing when you have not had one for 3 months. Also a Red Cross parcel, in a "P.O.W." camp a Red Cross box is a great luxury. The food in them was wonderful, especially to me, because two and a Half months of bread and soup soon loose their taste. We stayed here for a week, then started on our way to a permanent camp which was only about 3 or 4 hundred miles away, we travelled by box car, but it took us many weeks, to get there.

There, was maybe 50 of us, in a box car about 3/4 or 1/2 the size of ours at home. Just barely enough floor space for every one to sit down, and half stretch his legs out. We would go a little way and then stop, the railway would get bombed or troop train come through, a dozen reasons, but according to the priorities we were at the bottom of the list. We were locked in the box car. A bunch of American Bombers, bombed us. I didn't know, how many bombs they dropped but a lot hit about fifty or one hundred feet from us and sure gave us, a shake up. Another time, I said: "good bye to all." We had been parked in a rail yard, a guard was sitting at the open door. We jumped over him, out of the box car and ran for about a mile, before they dropped any more. As weak as I was, I sure ran.

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Then, we got to the prison camp "Stalag 7a" where I wrote Ginger and you through the Red Cross but I guess they never got far. We got our Red Cross box a week there, they were sure a blessing and a God send. The Germans gave us practically no food at all. Most of the horse meat they did gave us was rotten and couldn't be eaten. By this time Patton was getting close and we began to see the end.

On first part of April, we got notice to pack up. We made pack sack out of underwear top and bottom out of shirts or anything, thousands of us started out on a big march we did not know where. The odd time we slept in a barn at night, but most of the time we slept in a field or in the woods. The Germans give us a loaf and half of bread, a bowl of soup and about four pounds of spuds for 16 days. The rest we bartered, with our cigarettes or soap from the Red Cross parcels, from the German people, mostly farmers. We begged it, swiped it, or any way possible to get it.

But, thank God, for the Red Cross. They had big white trucks with Red Crosses on them and used to bring the Red Cross boxes to us. I had to look after myself, its up to yourself, if you want to eat. Some of us swiped it off the Farmers or the Germans or go hungry. When I had the chance, I didn't go hungry.

We marched in long columns and the Americans would fly over us and think we were German Soldiers and strafe us with 9 mm. machine gun and cannon which sure was terrible. One afternoon, they killed four, wounded four of our bunches. Another group had 40 killed and a bunch wounded. There was no fun when you know it was your own boys doing it.

It was harder on our nerves, then flying over Germany with flak and bombs all around. I will take my chance up there in the air dropping them, then down on the ground catching them and getting hit. We were very fortunate, the weather was warm all the time, but on the sixteenth day, we came to the end of our march of 100 miles and arrived at Mooseburg.

We were put behind the barbed wire. The food was pretty good there. We were getting a "Red Cross" box, each week. We were there until that glorious day of April 28, when the Americans 3rd Army had liberated us. It was won-

Mooseburg and Return to England

derful the sight of white bread. German bread is almost black and the white bread looked like your "angel food cake." We ate it the same way. Our food got better.

There was a farm just out of camp, with dozens of pigs in it. We killed them all one afternoon; just went with an axe or a knife, chased one until you got it cornered, hit it, bled it. Burn the hair off or cut the rind off, cut it up and carried it home. I had almost a pig head, under my bed. Fried pork for breakfast, dinner and supper. We swiped chickens, eggs, lettuce, carrots, spuds, beets ect. also got American rations and Red Cross boxes. Most of us made ourselves sick by eating to much, but we just couldn't resist, having the foods there and not eating it.

I was the cook for myself and five others we ate good. I swiped the foods and cooked it. All of it, helped pass the time away. The other guys in the were no good for that they were a little bashful. But, the Germans, still own me lots and they wouldn't feed us so, it was up to us to help ourselves.

On Armistice night, we built a huge fire. We put boxes, doors, wooden black out shuttles, tables, benches, chairs, beds, straw, wagons, everything that could be carried and burn; went on to the fire. But it was a little way of celebrating the end.

On May the 08, I walked to "Landshot" (15) and on the tenth flew to Reims. France had lunch there in an American Camp: turkey, green beans, spuds peaches and all I ate, two full dinners in about an hour and a half. It was served to us by German prisoners, which was wonderful, if we wanted more, we hollered at them, to get it. Throw our cigars on the ground, so they would have to pick them up and stepped on it to. We were a little bitter, it will take a while to get over it.

They knew how we had been treated and were sure scared of us. I would love the job of looking after some of them by God. The first night, we landed in England (by air) they had a party for us. All the eggs, bacon, and toast we could eat. Had beer and all. But I never drank much about 6 pints and I was high as a kite and the happiest, I had a big smile on my face. Boy it was great! I spent a couple of days in Bournemouth, got in touch with Ginger and just starting my six weeks leave.

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I am not sure what my rank is. But, at least a WO1 or maybe a P.O. Officer. I will know next week. Ginger and I are going to London and arrange about us going back which will be pretty soon. Ginger, was wonderful. I think everyone had given up hopes of every seeing me again, especially, after the news of January 03. But Ginger kept hoping. She never touched a penny of our money, every cent was put in the bank. We hope to have enough to buy a small house and furnish it. When we get back, so if you hear of anything, look into it because we hope we will be there in a couple of months.

I guess you got lots of telegrams. I sent 3 and wired flowers. Ginger sent a telegram, and wired flowers, the air ministry should have sent one. But it sure seems funny or queer. I should say, to read your own mourning letters. The people down here, are treating me wonderful. Ginger's Mom, getting extra milk, eggs, all that kind of food, and I am sure eating it.

We are planning to spend a couple of days up at Gladies place in Manchester, London and all over. We have to start watching my money, being so long without it and being able to buy things, well it just burns holes in your pockets. But, I think I have earned a little bit of a good time.

I eat about 5 times a day, at least or whenever I see food. I bought Ginger's brother-in-law civilian suit and getting it tailored to fit, it is a new one, wore only a couple of times and if I get my " WO1" which I will know this week-end. I am going to buy a good dress uniform.

My God! has "Nancy" changed! I keep looking at that big picture of her and she is really cute and I will bet quite a flirt, she looks a lot like "Betty". I guess, I have also missed Fred again. I believe he left England a couple of days ago. I will be seeing him soon. He seems to think quite a lot of Ginger and I sure hope all the rest of you do to. I am sure you will.

I have to go to church on Sunday, with Ginger's Mother, but I guess I have a lot to be thankful for. It was sure a surprise Jean having another baby and it is really swell to have it named Roberta after me. I guess, Jim may be over soon. I hope, I don't go back before he gets here. I am sure glad you and Pop, are still in good health. I guess, you will be moving out to the ranch

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pretty soon. Tell Pop, to get lots of roasters, a good young steer, a couple of porkers and lots of vegetables and all.

You will be having Ginger and I there pretty soon. I really like my eating now. It's great to hear that "Grandma's" still well and all of you except Granddad with a bad heart, is not so good. Let "Betty" , "Jean" and all read this, because I may not have time, to write them a long one. Give my love to Mrs. " Forest and Pop". You had best send my mail, direct to here, because I am not sure where I will be. I have still got my watch but it took a lot of keeping. I have had it on my ankle, up my sleeves lining of my coat. Not much more because I won't be able to fit it in the envelope. Mom write real soon a real long letter, one giving me all the news. I don't know where "Drum" is? I think the least he could have done was look up Ginger after I went missing. That's all over now, we are having a swell time. I will write again in London.

Love Bob

Fig.111 The 17 page letter I wrote by hand

"THE LONG RETURN"


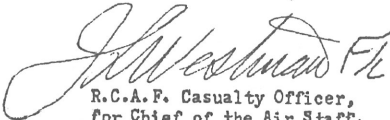
ADDRESS REPLY TO: THE SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE (P)R AIR, OTTAWA, ONTARIO.		OUR FILE R133074 (R.O.4) REF. YOUR DATED
ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE		
<u>A I R M A I L</u>		
OTTAWA, Canada, May 16th, 1945.		
 Mr. C.A. Porter, 3406 Imperial Street, New Westminster, British Columbia.		
 Dear Mr. Porter:		
 Confirming our telegram of recent date, and the information conveyed to you by Section Officer E.M. Best, I am pleased to inform you that the Royal Canadian Air Force Casualties Officer, Overseas, has advised me that your son, Flight Sergeant Robert Edward Porter, previously reported missing on Active Service is now reported to have arrived safely in the United Kingdom, on May 10th, 1945.		
 I join with you and the members of your family in your joy in your son's safety.		
Yours sincerely,		
		
R.C.A.F. Casualty Officer, for Chief of the Air Staff.		
 R.C.A.F. G. 32B 508A-1-44 (3778) H.Q. 885-C-22B		

Fig.11i May 16th. Letter my mother received from
the RCAF

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THE MAPLE LEAF

Thursday, May 31, 1945

His Friends Thought He Was Gone For Good

Wife's Faith Rewarded as Airman Returns

BOURNEMOUTH Given up for dead by almost everyone but his young English bride, Fl Sgt. Robert Porter, Burnaby, B.C., bomb-aimer, arrived in England after more than seven months' evading capture and several months in German prison camps.

Porter was first reported missing in June of last year, after an attack against Cologne, and until his arrival in England no word of his whereabouts has been heard by his wife, parents or friends.

At the "R.C.A.F. Released Prisoner of War Centre" here he told how he kept out of the clutches of the Germans, posing as a Dutch civilian. "I was blown out over Holland after our bomber was blown up in mid-air," he said. "The rest of the crew did not make it"

"and I got in touch with a Dutch man, who agreed to help me. I rode on the back of his bicycle, to his house, past couple of German soldiers, neither of whom recognized my uniform."

After moving into three different homes, Porter said, he finally settled in one near Utrecht, which he calls his permanent home in Holland. Here he was fitted out with civilians clothes.

The Vancouver airman had to leave the village at Christmas time, when the Gestapo started rounding up every Dutch man between the ages of 16 and 65 to work in Germany. He traveled through Holland to the Rhine, which he crossed by ferry after helping a German soldier push it off the river bank, but was finally captured after he and some friends were sighted by sentries.

"For four hours they chased us across the frozen, flooded country side. We made it to a hut and hid, but during the night there was a thaw and the melting ice around isolated us like an island, and we were captured."

Treated as a saboteur and terrorist, Robert was turned over to the German secret police and was threatened with shooting so often he finally didn't care. In March he was transferred to a prisoner of war camp and was liberated by American Army troops in May. "The 21-years-old airman reported that his telegram to his wife, who is serving in the W.A.A.F., was the first word that she had received about him since he had been reported missing."

She never lost hope, although most of my friends figured that I was "gone for good" he said.

Fig.11j Write-up in the "The Maple Leaf" the Air force Paper

"THE LONG RETURN"

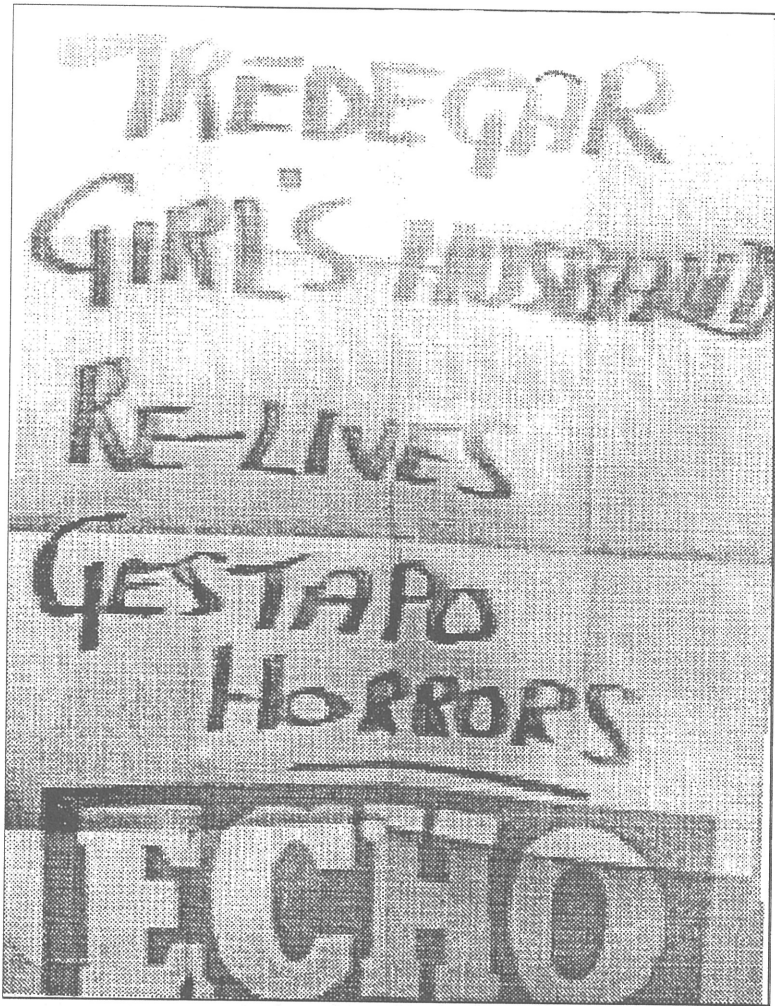


Fig.11m Two by four feet sign on all the street corners of Tredgar, South Wales where my wife lived

Mooseburg and Return to England

25th of June 1945.

H.Trompstr. Utrecht.
Holland.

Dear Mrs. Porter.

This letter comes from a family, where your husband hid himself, while he was in Holland during the war. We have done our best to find out, if he is still living, for he passed the border at Xmas and we didn't hear anything since. Something terrible has happened to us. My father was arrested on the first day of our liberation as he was accused of working with the Gestapo, which is not true of course. All my father's friends, such as Mr. Rakers, whom your husband knows very well, won't rest before they have my father set free, as it is a great injustice. The Field security believe in my father innocence and therefore he is under their protection. They asked us to try and find your husband and have him write a letter in which he tells how he was treated at our house. Where he stayed, and tell all what he thinks of my father, especially his political views. He has to swear this and have a military stamp on the paper. Will you please see that we will soon get this paper, as they threatened to shoot my Dad, which the Field Security prevented. We would be very thankful, if you would do this for us. We need it very badly and there is great hurry. Our best wishes also to your husband.

Yours truly

Shelah Heitinga

Fig.11n A copy of a letter from Shelah Heitinga writing about her Father

"THE LONG RETURN"

23 June 1945. 3

P.R.G.P.1st Cdn. Army (Overseas.)

Dear Bob,

I am a friend of the Heitinga family with whom you stayed for a time during your hiding in Holland. They have since had, and are now experiencing, a difficult period because Mr. Heitinga has been arrested by the Dutch Underground as a Gestapo agent. This arrest happened the first day we Canadians entered occupied Holland so I have not had the pleasure of speaking to him. However, I met Shelah and Eileen the first day of their liberation and have been almost permanent article in their home ever since.

I personally, as well as our own Canadians Fields Security, who have a helping hand in this Heitinga case, believe Mr. Heitinga is innocent!! It is most urgent (I repeat-most urgent) that we have a signed document with a lawyer's stamp on it, from you, stating what you know of Mr. Heitinga personally.

Tell all you can think of regarding your treatment here in the Heitinga's home. This document will prove Mr. Heitinga's anti-Nazi activities and may serve as a release for him. At the moment we believe that he is being framed so that another individual may go free.

This may be wrong but your statement will help greatly. "Please post the document by Air Mail and Register it as soon as possible"

I guess I should explain that my home is in Regina, Sask., and I am a member of the S.S.R. Let me hear from you post haste because days are precious. That is all I can think of at the moment so until I hear from you I remain,

Yours sincerely

Capt. L.W. Tracy.

P.S. Mrs Heitinga ,

Eileen and Shelah send

their love and best wishes

3 P.R.G

1 Cdn...Army Overseas

Fig.11o A copy of letter: Capt. Tracy's request for a character reference for Mr. Heitinga

Of course Ginger wanted to know what I had been doing and I found out that my sister Jean

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had had a baby girl whom she named "Roberta", after me. I had missed my brother Fred by a week. He had come to England on his way home from Africa. It was a funny feeling for people to meet me on the street when they told me they thought I was dead. We went up to the OTU (Operational Training Unit) in Stratford-on-Avon where Ginger was stationed and where I had first met her, to visit for a couple of days, then back down to Birmingham and then to Wales.

I received a great welcome home in Wales, with the whole town turning out. There were big news paper signs on all the street by the newspaper selling papers. All the neighbours brought their extra rations. Farmers gave us eggs to build me up and get my weight back. I mentioned to someone that I had the urge to have a gooseberry pie. My God, I had them coming out of my ears! Everybody brought them over. I never mentioned anything else I would like after that.

I received a letter from Shelah Heitinga and one from a Captain Tracy of the Canadian Army. Shelah's father was having great difficulties with the authorities in Holland. I got in touch with the Canadian Army and they got in touch with Captain Tracy. I wanted to go over to Holland and speak for him personally. They didn't think that would help anymore so I wrote everything down on paper, everything I could remember. I had all the information documented by a lawyer to make sure it was all legal, and could be used in the court in Holland. I felt strongly about this as the

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Heitinga's had treated me so well. I was positive he wasn't a traitor. He wouldn't have helped me twice if he was. He also knew what Rakers was doing and a lot of Papa Rakers' friends were doing for a long time. The letters from Shelah and Captain Tracy are self-explanatory.

My six weeks leave soon came to an end and I had to report back to Bournemouth. Ginger came down with me and we got a small hotel room . It was only for a few days and then I got travelling papers to head back to Canada. I got the ship from Gourock, Scotland and I was on my way home. Funny how things worked. I wanted to stay in England for a while and there were thousands who wanted to go home, but I had to go.

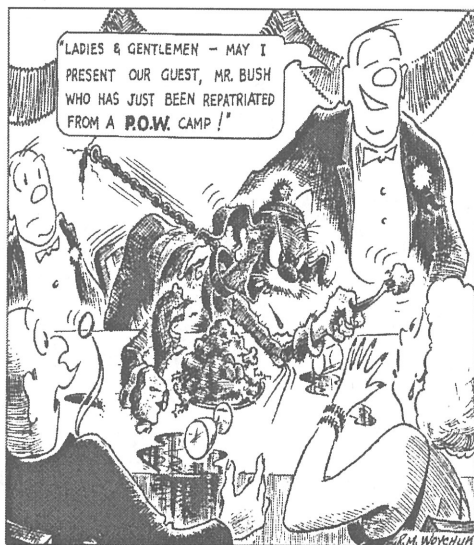


Fig.11p Ex-POW out for dinner