

## Chapter Eight

### To Nuremburg

We had been in the concentration camp for a couple of months but now something was going on. We noticed things changing and we now had Wehrmacht guards only, no SS or Gestapo. One morning we were taken out of our cells and were put in the back of a truck. "Here we go again" I thought. Wilf Berry, Louis Trainor, Marcel Briere, Harvey Swartz and myself were back together again, just the five of us. The guards had a machine gun but didn't have the toughness of the SS. We didn't know if we were being moved to another place or just out for the day. As before, there was nothing to pack, nothing to take with us, we only had the clothes on our back. We headed towards Germany, getting farther from the Allied lines all the time. The Germans seemed a little different, especially the officers. We found out from somebody that the US army counter attacked from the south to link up with the others and drive the Germans back. It was later known as the "Battle of the Bulge." It happened in France, in the Ardennes. General McAuliffe, was Commanding Officer of the US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division which was trapped, encircled at Bastogne, Belgium. General McAuliffe was called upon to surrender but refused. He became

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famous for replying “Nuts” to the German demand to surrender. Eventually, thanks to Patton the US Army broke out. All the SS, Gestapo and German Officers were called back to Berlin.

We had been driving for a few hours when we came to another camp. It was a dispersal camp. The distances in Europe are not like in Canada; in a day you can drive almost from one side of the country to the other. In this camp there were all types of uniformed prisoners, army fellows and aircrew that had just been shot down during the last few days. It was a great relief to be out of the control of the SS and the Gestapo. Things could only get better as I was now classified as a Prisoner of War, a great promotion from a civilian spy in a concentration camp. I had some hope now and could see signs that we were going to get out of this mess alive.

In this small holding camp, I was separated from Wilf and the others I had been with. No good-byes. They were shoved one way and I was pushed the other. The army was also separated from the air force. The officers were separated from the non-commissioned ranks. I never saw Wilf again until a couple of years after the war.

I was put into a hut (sort of nice, compared to the cells I had been in for the last three months). It was not the least bit fancy, very sparse, but it was better than it had been. The other prisoners were air crew, some of whom had had breakfast in England only the day before. They had just been shot down or had bailed out and were still in shock, wondering what had happened to them. They all had nice clean uni-

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forms on, looked well-fed and nice neat haircuts. We newcomers were welcomed with a cup of ersatz coffee and a hunk of bread.

I had still not washed or shaved. My clothes were not in very good shape and I still didn't have proper shoes, only my wooden ones. I could walk well with them now, although it had taken a lot of practice. Wooden shoes are not flexible at all, so when you lift your foot up, you have to push your toes down and raise the heel up. I got to the point I could even run with them. However, my feet were not in very good shape as they had been half frozen on the ice the night I got captured. They would have been a lot better if I had had proper shoes. As I had not changed my clothes for three months and had been wet and dry many times, I had a pungent body odour. The newly captured air crew thought that I was a Dutch civilian at first as I looked very dirty, scruffy and I stank. They tried to kick me out of their hut but I refused to go. After being on the loose for ten months, I had learned how to look after myself!

Again, the Germans thought I could understand them so I became spokesperson. I went up, when they called, to get our food rations. I won't ever forget that! It was a bucket of cabbage, or something similar, made into a soup. It looked like it even had a bit of horse meat in it. They also gave us a hunk of German black bread. The other air crew said, "No way are we going to eat that!" They weren't hungry enough yet. So, I had all I wanted of the soup and the bread! The bread that I couldn't eat, I put in my pocket. This turned some of the guys off. The bread

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and the soup took a little getting used to. I understand the Germans used to make the bread months ahead, some even said years ahead. And then they wrapped it in something so it would keep. The bread was very heavy and black, quite different to what we were used to. It had been a long time since I had been full. The newly captured guys really thought I was something different, but it wouldn't be long until they would be ready to eat. That was the main diet the German soldiers got, black bread and cabbage soup.

All these new prisoners had packages of cigarettes with them and some still had their escape packages containing little luxuries. Some carried a couple of chocolate bars, even razors and shaving cream. Those were real luxuries to me. They didn't realise how scarce these things were going to be, but I did! I was sort of on the scrounge and their chocolate bars tasted really great! I bummed a razor and had a good shave, which was really great and I even used their shaving cream for soap. It felt so good! I acquired a couple of packs of cigarettes, but there still was no place to bathe, nor to get clean clothes.

It was really good to be able to talk to the guys about what had happened around the world and in England over the last ten months. There was a comic strip called "Jane" in the paper. Everyone read "Jane". She was always getting into situations and ending up nude, but nothing the least bit crude. I am sure anyone, who was ever in England during the war would remember "Jane". There were rumours that Roosevelt was very sick, but just rumours, as that

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would be real bad blow to the Allies if anything happened to him! He was very tough, like Churchill. The Invasion was coming along well, but it was a tough battle all the way. The German resistance was amazing after fighting a war on at least three fronts for five years. The African front was finally over.

Mussolini in Italy was finished, and the Italians had capitulated. The Germans still had big battles going on in Russia and were taking great losses. The Russians were advancing on Berlin at the same pace the Allies were going across France, Belgium and Holland. Both the Russians and the Allies wanted to take Berlin. The SS were fighting to the last man. Their belief in winning the war was unbelievable, right to the very last.

I was now a real POW. I was beyond the control of the SS and Gestapo. According to the Geneva Convention, there were things we should have been allowed, which I couldn't demand before. The problem was, the Germans didn't have anything to offer by now. A lot of them knew the end was coming but very few would admit it. Some of the other prisoners were complaining about various things but I told them how damned lucky they were, here, rather than in some of the places they could be.

After a few days of regrouping we started the next part of our journey. About 50 of us started walking further into Germany. For the first couple of days, it wasn't bad. It is surprising what a little food will do. However, in the main cities it was very bad for the POWs in uniform. The people knew they were all flyers and they called them, "Terror Fliegers." They had

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a lot of bad names hissed at them in anger and the Germans would throw things at them. I guess you couldn't blame them, as the Allies had been bombing them night and day, trying to demoralise the people and bring the war to an end. Particularly during the last few months, the civilians didn't get much relief as the Americans bombed in the daylight and the British and Allies at night. A few years previous the English had been bombed day and night, now it was the Germans turn, but the British hadn't started this war.

I was very scruffy-looking in my old clothes and wooden shoes. I hung around at the back of the lines and the civilians just thought I was a Dutch prisoner. The guys at the front of the line were the "Terror Fliegers." I never got hit at all. Looking like a Dutchman, I was often given food and things which the others weren't. I took full advantage of it. I sure laughed at the other guys. They were all very new at this and thought that things were very bad. They were nervous but they hadn't met the SS and the Gestapo. In comparison, this was sort of like a boy scout hike to me.

There was no such thing as a bathroom. We would stop in a city square, or a similar area, and we would just have to relieve ourselves, wherever we were. Our guards liked to make public spectacles of us, but there was no way we were going to go in our pants. The German soldiers were never shy and would urinate any place. It is the other job that was more embarrassing.

The Germans did not expect us to try to escape anymore as we were getting deeper and deeper into

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Germany. There was very little food in Germany and we had to depend on the guards for the little bit we got. The guards protected us from the people as much as guarding us. Nobody told us where we were going or why, but it didn't really matter to us. We were only putting in time until the Allied forces caught up with us or the war came to an end.

About a week later we arrived at another dispersal camp which was the first organised camp I had been in. The others were all sort of make-shift types of places. This camp had prisoners from all over but, best of all, it had some Red Cross personnel in it. I got my first shower and a change of clothes; it had been over three months since I had taken my clothes off. The fellows I was with were relieved that I finally was able to take a shower. Now we were on equal footing, all smelling clean, and we could get dirty together now. I found it was quite a shock to the body, to have one's first shower. In fact, I could only take a little at a time as they didn't want me to pass out.

The change of clothes felt really great. I got a pair of boots with socks and was glad to get rid of the wooden shoes. However, they had served me well and I should have saved them for souvenirs. We were all given a blanket and a Red Cross parcel. The Red Cross Organisation that provided the parcels was a God-send. I don't know what the POWs would have done without them. The parcels contained a can of Klim, which was powdered milk. The Klim can was about five inches high and five inches round and we would put a handle on the empty can, to use it as a cup or a cooking pot to boil things in. Many things

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were made out of Klim cans. There was also a can of Spam, the canned pork that everyone in the services knew about. It had replaced the corned beef of the First World War. After the war, some people had saved a special can of Spam for when we came home, but by then it was the last thing we wanted to see. The parcels also had a couple of cartons of American cigarettes, which were the main thing we used for trading. The guys that did not smoke had a great advantage. You could trade cigarettes for almost anything and they had the highest value. There were also a few chocolate bars and a few vitamin pills in the parcels as well as K rations, which were US army dinners. The parcels differed a little, so there was always a little excitement when getting one.

I talked to a Red Cross worker who tried to get a letter to my wife and mother. I had been away for ten months now and had no contact with anybody. I tried to let them know I was OK. I guess the Red Cross did send one message but it got lost in the shuffle. It was very hard to get anything out of Germany as things were in disarray.

The respite didn't last long and we were off again very shortly. I had to pack this time. I had my blanket and part of a Red Cross parcel. We used to say, "God Bless the Red Cross." This wasn't said in the religious way, it was just a saying. I never saw the Germans interfere with the Red Cross parcels or with their work. I'm not saying they never took from the Red Cross, I am only saying, I never saw them doing it. The Red Cross was a world peace organisation that didn't take



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sides and worked according to the Geneva Convention.

There was a group of about fifty of us, all air crew. They marched us most of the day. As usual, we did not have a clue where we were going, but we knew we were not coming back here. We came to a big railway marshalling yard where all the box cars were held. We didn't like being in these places as they were one of the Allies' favourite bombing targets. Rail was the main way the Germans moved military materials to the front. We were put in a box car. On the side there was a sign, "Hommes 40 or 8 Chevaux", Forty men or Eight horses.

This, we found out was going to be our home for the next while. The big door was locked when we were travelling and the guards were in another part of the train. Often, when we stopped they would open the door and a German soldier would stand guard. There were a couple of square holes in the wall, up high, (about six inches by ten inches.) We could look out if we stood on our toes. That was our fresh air. We would take turns looking out and tell the others what was happening.

We heard we were going south to a camp in southern Germany. We were actually being used as pawns, constantly moving us away from the front lines. We had markings on top of our boxcars, "POW" and they would then put us in the middle of a freight train. This wasn't right, because according to the Geneva Convention they weren't supposed to put POWs near a target of any kind. The high level

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bombers couldn't see the sign and the low level bombers didn't believe it.

We were a low priority. At the least excuse, we would be put on a siding and left there until we could be hooked onto another train that was going our way. I often wondered if there was anyone looking after the trains, and where they were going. It was very slow going but it didn't make much difference as we didn't know where we were going anyway. With all our bodies in the box car we weren't cold.

When we were on a siding in a marshalling yard, we would very often be next to a box car full of Jewish people. It was horrible. We had fifty or sixty of us in our box car and we could all sit down. However, they had more than hundred and had to stand all the time. They were dressed in clothing that looked like striped pyjamas. They were so thin and gaunt-looking. I was in bad shape, but they were much, much worse. We saw many that did not even have water to drink. If one died, they would just push the body out of the box car. They had no other choice. I don't think the guards ever opened their doors for fresh air or anything else. They included men, women and kids, all packed in worse than animals. It must have been stifling in there, as they only had the small holes in the wall like ours. No one can tell me the Holocaust never happened. The little I saw of it was far worse than anything I ever saw on film after the war.

One day we were sitting in a siding when we heard the bombers coming. The big door was opened and the guard was sitting at the door. We just knew they

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were going to bomb. It was a squadron of US Flying Fortresses. You could always tell when it was them as they glistened in the sky. They were all lining up on the bombing run, ready to drop their bombs. We jumped over the guard and out the door and ran and ran. Sometimes you think you can only run so far, but you can run a lot farther when you have to. The guard shot at us, but I think he shot in the air, as no one was hit. He had to put on a show! I guess he was frightened too, or maybe he was running as well. What a horrible whistle the bombs make when they are coming down! They sure bombed the hell out of the rail yard. We all agreed we would rather be up there dropping them than down below catching them. It seemed to last a long time, and that was the closest I had been to the bottom end of a big bombing raid.

When we were sure it was over we went back to the box car. The guard was there waiting for us. He was angry because he had been knocked out of the box car when we all clambered over him. He was also angry because our own planes dropped bombs on us, but our box car was not hit. The poor Jewish people were locked in their box car the whole time and it must have been horrible! We were frightened but it gave us a lot of exercise and something to talk about. Now I knew how the people must have felt being bombed day after day. No wonder they called us "terror fliers". London and all of southern England had had it for years, during the first part of the war, night after night. Then later the Germans began sending over Buzz Bombs or Doodlebugs and the V2 rockets. They were scary and deadly for the people

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they hit. They did quite a lot of damage, mostly to houses but also to the odd factories.

Our food arrived irregularly; nothing seemed organised. We only got our watery soup and bread when we happened to be in the right place at the right time. We only travelled a few miles a day and then we were parked on a siding again. There were a lot of trains going back and forth to the front. The only priority we had was when they wanted to use our box car in the middle of their train so the aircraft would not bomb.

Finally, we stopped in a big marshalling yard outside a big city, where we were taken out of the box car and walked for a few hours. We soon came to the biggest camp I had seen with many different sub-camps. There were thousands of POWs in all. We were put in a barrack here so had a roof over our head.

We scrounged around and found a thin straw mat each, and registered for our Red Cross parcel. We soon learned what we were supposed to do and not do regarding all the rules and regulations. This was the Nuremburg POW Camp. I hoped it was going to be my home until the end of the war. I had travelled enough on their railway and I didn't need any more hiking.

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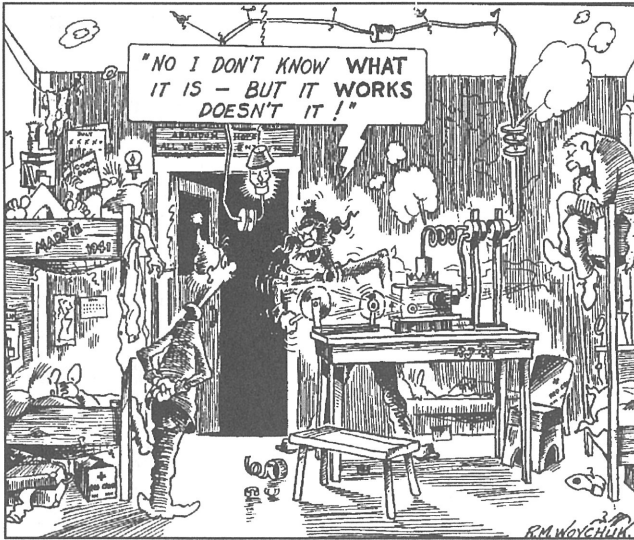


Fig.8a POW's tried to make many thing.

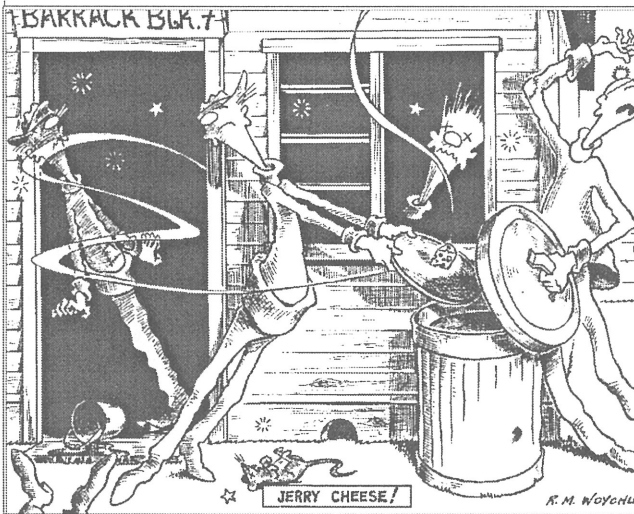


Fig.8b German Cheese

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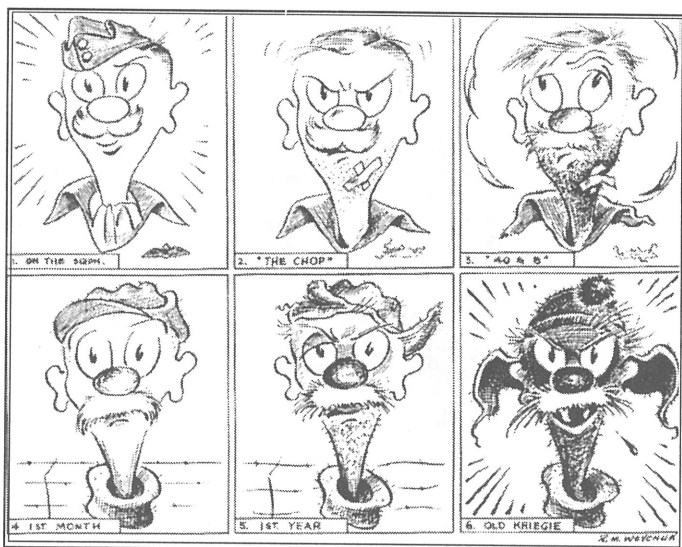


Fig.8c An Airmen on Squadron to an old Kriegie



Fig.8d An old Kriegie meeting his nephew

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*Fig. 8e An old Kriegie*