

Chapter Nine

Nuremburg to the Big March

The Nuremburg camp didn't have bunks or beds, but it was a lot better than the boxcars I had been in and a hell of a lot better than the three months when first captured that I had spent on cement floors. After sleeping on cold concrete floors, the wooden floor with a thin straw mat didn't feel that bad. There were a hundred of us in one hut, just room enough to lay down. The smell was horrible with that many men in such close quarters and no hot baths or soap. There was a lot of complaining and bitching and I'd tried to tell the fellows how tough things could really get. We knew the end was in sight as we could hear the big guns in the distance.

We had roll call every morning as we all had to be accounted for. It was called "Appel". Our senior officer had to get us all lined up for it. The dress was a mixture of Air Force uniforms, civilian clothes or whatever you had. A more scruffy bunch I had never seen. The German NCO's would be yelling but finally everything would quiet down and the counting would begin. The odd time someone would be missing or they counted wrong. This got the Germans very ex-

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cited and the count would start all over again. They would always leave us standing there until they finished. It was here that we got our little propaganda speech, especially after a bombing. One day the Red Cross truck came, but it was almost full of clothes brushes. You can imagine how those went over. They just sat in a pile. There were a few tooth brushes. Now they were in heavy demand so each camp got a quota to be raffled off. It was a big exciting raffle but I didn't get one. A tooth brush would have really been great! Try going a few days without cleaning your teeth, (I had gone months) and you realise how important they are.

Our toilets, or latrines as we called them in England, were holes dug in the ground, about six feet deep, about four feet wide and twenty feet long. There were a couple of long poles on each side and that was where you sat. It was generally quite busy as a lot of the guys had dysentery, which is not very nice at the best of times.

In the morning we were given a cup of ersatz coffee and a piece of black bread. Later a horse-drawn cart would come into the camp and head to the kitchen, delivering a small hunk of meat and a sack of some kind of cabbage. It would be cooked up in a soup and that would be our supper. I can remember once looking at a piece of rotten potato and saying, "Look, it's rotten," and carried on eating it. If we ever got a piece of meat, we would really chew it slowly, or save it until we went to bed, something to really savour. I must admit by this time the Germans didn't have much to eat themselves.

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We also got our Red Cross parcels, one every two weeks between two people. They were just great, and it was always very exciting because of what might be in them. One of the items I enjoyed most was de-lousing powder. Earlier on, when a Red Cross truck came with newspapers, I liked to take my time when visiting the latrine and read a newspaper, but those days were long gone. The smell was always bad. This pit was also used for other purposes. If anyone was caught stealing food from anyone else or the kitchen they were thrown in to the toilet pit (that was a big deep hole in the ground with a couple of poles across to sit on which was our toilet.) They had a hell of a time getting out, and as we had no hot showers, everyone knew who they were for a long time. There was nothing lower than stealing food; everyone was hungry.

We had absolutely no eating utensils at all. Some of the older POWs who had been prisoners for a few years had these things but we new ones didn't. I made a wooden spoon first. I got a piece of wood and started going to work on it using a piece of glass as a knife. It took a long time but I had lots of this as I wasn't going anywhere. It worked pretty well, but rubbing your tongue on a piece of dry wood is really awful. It sort of goes right through you. I later found a small lid that had come off something from a Red Cross parcel, (there was nothing ever wasted from Red Cross Parcels). As I said, time didn't go fast and I liked to keep busy. Some of the fellows just sat around feeling sorry for themselves all day long, but I would try to find something to do. My deluxe spoon I

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used an oval lid, I pounded the centre with a stone and then I found a piece of wire to make a lip around the spoon. Secondly, I attached the wire and looped it around for a handle. This was deluxe utensil compared with my wooden spoon.

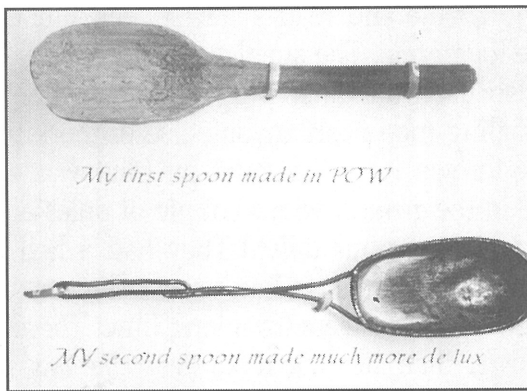


Fig.9a The Wooden spoon I made first and then I made the deluxe Metal Spoon

The camp was on a hill a couple of miles out from the city of Nuremburg and we could hear aircraft coming over. First, we saw the Pathfinders dropping their markers on the City. Then the main bomber stream started arriving, hundreds of them. We heard the roar of the planes, then the whine of the bombs coming down. We could hear the German anti-aircraft guns booming away. Then the bombs started going off. We all knew that, for many reasons, a few missed their target. We all wondered if the crews had been told in their briefing that we were down here, so close to the city. The huts literally bounced up and

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down. It looked like Halloween but this was April. I found out after the war that there was 129 Halifax Bombers of No 4 Group and 14 Lancaster pathfinders on the Raid on Railway Yards. It was reported, that "the bombing attack achieved great accuracy and they had lost no planes."

The Germans were yelling at anyone who left the huts or opened any black-out curtain. I was lucky because I had a good window seat. However, the guards were not very nice the next day. We assumed that quite a few people had been killed and maybe even some of the guards' immediate families. The city was almost destroyed. We knew the Allies must be getting close, but again, the German morale remained very high. We knew it was almost over, so why didn't they see that the end was so close? Maybe they did but were afraid to admit it, or didn't even know how to admit it.

There was a very high fence all around the compound with barbed wire on top. We couldn't go near it. There was another short electric fence about 10 feet inside the big one. We weren't even allowed past this short fence. We were all well warned that we would be dead if we went into this area. The guards had machine guns pointing along the space between the fences. At night they had very bright lights along the fence, plus special spot-lights from the guard towers. The only chance of escape was if you built a tunnel. A lot of tunnels were built but only a few were successful. I did not see any organised escape because it was getting too close to the end of the war. The Great Escape was a big success. There is a very

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good book on this and they also made a movie of it. That escape was very well organised and well planned. They built a tunnel all the way out of the camp, and supplied forged identity papers and civilian clothes.

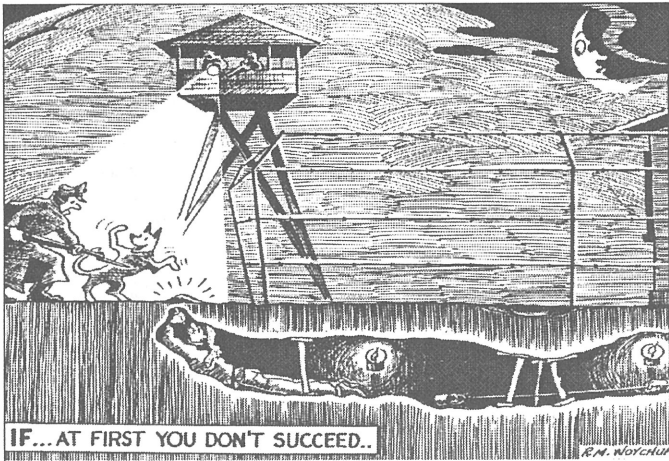


Fig.9b One way to escape. Some made it.

However, there weren't too many prisoners who actually got out of Germany. A large percentage were caught. Hitler was very annoyed and gave the order to have most of them shot. That was definitely against the Geneva Convention because it was our duty to try to escape and keep as many Germans as busy as possible. If they were doing that, they couldn't be fighting in the front lines.