

Part III, A March in the Snow, Robert P. Fleege, D.D.S.,

1976/1988

Much anxiety was in the air as Father Paul Cavanaugh, S.J. came over to our barracks to say Mass. It was Tuesday, March 27, 1945. A beautiful day. The dutiful Father took his chalice, wine and water from its hiding place. He set up the little altar on the table. We all knelt down. He began the Mass. About that time all hell broke loose. Father Cavanaugh turned around facing the kneeling GI's. His countenance was ashen white. Fear permeated all those present. "Boom, Boom," roared the tank guns. The barracks shook. "Rata tat tat" from the Browning machine guns. "Burrp, Burrp" the answering German fire. With bated voice the Father said, "Itta missa est". The mass is ended. "I shall give you all General Absolution from your sins." With that pronouncement the machine guns started to peel some plaster off the adjacent walls. It was every man for himself. Seeking whatever cover one could find, I hit the floor. Made like a small sausage. Rolled myself up against the wall on the floor. Saying my prayers, as I thought only He can save me now.

Word came down shortly that all men were to remain inside the barracks. The intensity of the attack on the defending Germans, who were dug in, increased. After a time we got used to the sounds of combat. The terrible fear that first gripped us now gave way to the reality of what was happening. After what seemed forever, the tank guns and assault guns became quiet. One at a time we rose from the floor, rushing forthwith to the windows to have a look.

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I stuck my stupid head up, to see out the window. I presumed to see Col. Waters, in the company of Hauptmann (Captain) Fuchs with several others. They were carrying an American flag and also a white flag. This looked like the Germans were surrendering. They were. A great cheer arose from all the men. About half an hour later, back came Col. Waters. He was being carried in a blanket. In the process of carrying out his brave mission to accept the German surrender, a German paratrooper shot him in the backside. A tough break for the son-in-law of General George S. Patton.

Excitement was in the air. Word got around that we were being freed. The Serbian Officers cheered like crazy. We all felt exuberant, like the second coming of the Lord. We all thought the whole 3rd United States Army was just outside the gates of the Prison. Little did we know that this was the beginning of something still more exciting. The mind shaking truth of reality was just around the corner.

The unfortunate Task Force Baum that had just shot down the German Garrison, our saviors, were about to be annihilated by their German rivals, whom they had just utterly defeated.

Around 6:00 PM the main show was over. Orders came down that we were to form up. Take all your meager belongings that you can carry. This was the first day we did not get our ration of bread at 4:00 PM. Carefully I took my two blankets, cigarettes, soap bars, canteen, wool cap, knife, field jacket coat. There was no food that I had.

It will be just a short march to the trucks. Then there will be food and all the comforts of the good life. All of us were just brimming with that great feeling of freedom. Soon all were formed in company formation of 4's. "All present or accounted for, Sir!" Oh how happy and confident, just waiting for the command to start. Finally the word came, "Forward! March."

Past the bobwire fences waving to the Serbs, at last through the great holes made in the fences by the Tanks. After about an hour we came upon the Task Force. We thought the whole 3rd Army was there. What a shock. There before our tired eyes was a sight to behold. Three Sherman tanks. Six light tanks. Three assault guns. 22 half tracks. About 100 tired GI's.

First thing on my mind was to find a good sergeant. He proceeded to tell me this was it. How they had fought their way 60 miles from Aschaffenburg to Hammelburg. Losing some men and vehicles in the process. Now the only way out was to fight their way back. It was a grim situation. GI's were milling around getting all the latest poop. D bars and smokes were handed out to the hungry POW's. They treated us most kindly and felt sorry for the sad shape of our health. "Now what to do?"

Some D's were handed out to the hungry POW's. They treated us most kindly and felt sorry for the sad shape of our health. "Now what to do?"

Darkness was approaching along with the cold. The forlorn, excited POW's crowded around the armored vehicles. They wanted to get warm from the heat of the motors. Also, it was to be noted, many were forming little groups. It was crystal clear that we were free 60 miles in the middle of Germany. Our group was composed of about 35 men. Everyone was taking stock of his possessions. The brave Task Force people knew the cards were stacked against them.

There we stood with some taking it easy sitting on the cold ground with their blankets wrapped around them. We looked like a bunch of Indians having a Pow Wow. The moon parted through the clouds. Twilight was over. It was now dark. Small arms fire was heard in the distance. The word came down, "No lights, no smoking, talk in whispers. 1291

free Americans in the middle of the woods, 60 miles from the American lines, without food or supplies. We awaited orders from the commanding officer, Colonel Goode. The Colonel had been conferring with Captain Baum, the Task Force commander. Now after getting all the information, the good Colonel was to give us his last order, to the men of Oflag XIII B.

The moon now began to give us more light. We were very excited as Colonel Goode mounted the turret of a tank. Silhouetted against the sky, all eyes and ears were concentrated on the figure of Colonel Goode. His speech was quite simple and direct. He explained the situation in no uncertain terms.

"Men, this is just a small task force. You are 60 miles from the American lines. There are three choices to be made by you:

1. Fight your way back to the American lines with the remainder of the task force, and take your chances of making it.
2. Be retaken, and go back to the POW Camp. Then be marched to Berchtesgaden or Munich deep inside Germany.
3. Hit the timber and try to get to the American lines on your own."

As a final note, the Colonel said, "God be with you; make your own decision."

If you ever saw a bunch of stunned and busy GI's, it was at this last pronouncement of the Colonel's speech. "Now what to do?"

All the little groups of men were hastily conferring, talking it over, trying to make a proper choice. It meant life or death to all. Some of the more able people were climbing up on the tanks and half tracks. Others were completely stunned or still in shock, just standing there quietly. Finally, too many POW's tried to force their way life or death to all. Some of the more able people were climbing up on the tanks and half tracks. Others were completely stunned or still in shock, just standing there quietly. Finally, too many POW's tried to force their way into or on top of the vehicles. At this point the commanders of the Task Force vehicles took over and restored order. Many a tired POW was forced to dismount. Things were getting hairy as dawn would soon come. The Germans were on the hunt. We were being hunted.

Other little groups voted to return to the prison camp. Which they did. At 1:30 AM, 40 guards lined them up for the march inside Germany.

Our little group of about 35 men were talking over the situation. The unanimous vote was for us to hit the timber. Try and make it on our own.

It was now about 9:30 PM. Final decisions were being

made. A lieutenant from my old battery spotted me in the dark. He asked me, "What are you going to do?" "Hit the timber and get the hell out of here." "Please take me with you", he pleaded.

I was waiting for a break like this and was all set to go. On my person were four suits of German underwear, German Air Force jacket which was quickly thrown away, five packs of cigarettes, two bars of soap, two blankets, field jacket, some pepper for dogs, a worn-out GI great overcoat, a knife, OD wool cap, and a canteen. The canteen I had removed from a dead GI.

There we stood, so forlorn looking at each other. I said, "Mac, you want to come along. Where is your blanket?" He had nothing, except his clothes and a towel hanging from his shoulders. "How in hell do you expect to get out of Germany without a blanket or a damn thing?" He was like a lost, little boy, almost in tears. "Please take me with you." he begged again. Now, noting his coughing and illness, I could see he was perfectly helpless. So I gave him my extra blanket. One further bit of instruction to him, "If you start to cough and make noise, stick that towel in your mouth, so you cannot be heard. Now if the Germans hear you, say, 'Kamerad' Surrender, tell them that you are all alone. Promise me that or you do not go with me." He said, "I promise."

Things were happening fast, it was now almost 11:00 PM. Lt. Dick Smalley and a few other formed up in ranks of four abreast, about 35 men in all. Soon things were in marching order. The confusion of making decisions was past. Now was a time for action. It was very dark as the column of POW hurriedly commenced to march away from this land of death. Quickly the column moved down the road away from the camp and the doomed task force. We had hardly made 1000 yards before we came upon a nasty scene. On the side of the road lay a wounded German who had been hit when the POW camp was overrun. He was bleeding profusely and doing a lot of moaning. I was number 3 from the head of the column, as we stopped to investigate the situation.

Many stupid Americans said, "Kill the bastard". "No", said I, "Let the Medics take care of him. Within the hour, you, yourselves, may be recaptured or killed."

On went the column. It was very dark. After going about three miles a most unusual thing occurred. Being very close to the front of the column, I could see Lt. Smalley. All at once, without a word of warning from anybody, the entire head of the column quickly and quietly rolled over into the ditch. Following the actions of the man ahead, every person quickly and quietly did the same maneuver.

Lying quietly in the pitch dark ditch, very close to the road, our ears were straining, eyes could see nothing. It was as dark as the inside of a cow's belly. Very soon our ears commenced to hear, "Clopck, Clopck". The sounds of a German Infantry Company on a night march, headed no doubt for Hammelburg. As we lay there frozen to the ground, the enemy troops passed on without further adieu. After I got over the initial shock, my feet took me at once to talk to Lt. Smalley who had been at the head of the column. "Dick, what the hell happened?" I asked, "You were up front". Looking at me with those sad brown eyes, he said, "Fox Hole, I can't hear". The poor man had led us head on into a German marching formation. Only by the grace of God and a lot of luck did we get by undetected. "What in hell are you doing up front if you can't hear?"

After that close call we needed a new man up front at the head of the column. Being able to understand some German and knowing how the German mind worked under stress, I knew we were in for a real tough time.

It was still dark as I marched at the head of the escaping POW's. Soon daylight would come. This called for a wise decision. Where to hide and take stock of our position, and also the position of our oppressors who would soon be hunting us. Either to capture us or kill us.

In the early dawn we halted. After a hurried conference it was decided to get off the road. Looking about the country side from the road, a wooded hill top seemed the most expeditious place to head for. At this point the men were very tired. Silence was observed. The cold morning fog and the dew were on the ground. Like a herd of sheep, 35 excited and worn out men started up a hill.

The terrain was grassy, a few trees and bushes. After a lot of effort, puffing, and struggling we gained the top of the hill. Our objective was reached. It was almost

The terrain was grassy, a few trees and bushes. After a lot of effort, puffing, and struggling we gained the top of the hill. Our objective was reached. It was almost daylight. Darkness still prevailed. As each man settled down to a comfortable place on top of the hill amongst the underbrush and trees all was quiet. For the present moment, our little group seemed safe and secure after a long, hard, and desperate march through the night. Soon snoring and heavy breathing enveloped the little wooded area.

Suddenly without warning a tremendous blasting noise. Tanks and assault guns firing a terrific barrage, followed by heavy small arms. It sounded not too far away from our secluded hiding place in the woods atop the hill. The battle lasted for about one half hour. We had the fear of God in our hearts. Looking at each other we knew the Germans had surrounded the Task Force. There was no doubt in our minds that the task force had been annihilated. Soon all became quiet.

It was still dark in the small woods where we were seeking refuge from the Germans. All of us laid down and tried to get some sleep and keep warm. After a couple of hours it began to get daylight. Now we assembled the little group of scared POW's. About 35 men were present. They munched on the remnants of what little food they found in their pockets.

It was decided to make a short reconnaissance. Sure enough our position was on top of a hill, surrounded by deep ravines. On one side of the hill a macadam, black top road could be seen if you went all the way down. Church bells could be heard calling a Mass. Also the Angelus bell was sounded at 6:00 AM, 12:00 noon, and 6:00PM. The distant farm sounds of cocks crowing, cattle softly mooing, along with the barking of dogs were heard.

A most peaceful place deep in the quiet forest alone with the chirping of birds. Alone with nature. No food or water except my canteen. It now was very clear, we were free POW. What a dangerous, dreadful freedom. The hunt was on, we were the hunted.

The Germans knew that we had to be in the near vicinity, only it would take time for them to close off all points of escape. During the day we checked out all possible points to break out of this trap. The patrolling cars had loud speakers going back and forth along the only road we could see. "Come on out Yanks, we know you are there."

At night we gave it another try. Wandering along the perimeter looking for an unguarded area hour after hour. About 2:00 AM slithering along in the dark woods hoping desperately for a break, I had a real close brush with death. Slipping quietly down the hill through the trees, making another attempt to break out I ran smack into a German patrol. What saved me this time was I spotted their lighted cigarettes in the dark. There before me was a half track filled with soldiers working the radio. The dogs and other guards were not too far away. I froze in my tracks, dropped a little pepper and disappeared on up the hill.

After several days of trying to break out, it seemed impossible. Going through the woods one day, I came upon a Sergeant. We silently advanced toward each other. He was wearing the patch of the 4th Armored Division. "Sergeant, what in hell are you doing here?", I said. He looked at me and laughed. "The same thing you are doing; trying to get the hell out of here.", he said, "I escaped from a work party. I was captured in France while out on patrol." He was tall, very thin, blue eyes, a country boy from Texas.

of this woods and through the patrols, he and I could do it. Things were getting much tougher, the Germans were closing in on our little group of POW's. The situation was now getting desperate. All the men assembled. Our group was too large to slip through the patrols. It was decided to try and form little groups of three. Each group was to try and make it on their own.

We all said our sad goodbyes. I decided to take the Sergeant and the sick lieutenant with me. The Lt. begged so hard to go along with me, I could not turn him down. Our final meeting with the large group broke up about 4:00 PM. One last thing, it was agreed that any one who became recaptured would tell the Germans, "I am alone, there is no one else with me."

Now the Sgt., the Lt., and I were ready to break out of this wooded prison. It was getting dark and cold. I prayed for a fog to roll in as that was our only hope. How I did pray. Silently, Indian file, we made our way down the hill. God surely must have heard my prayers. Our path led directly to the road where German patrol cars kept up their daily vigil. After about 30 minutes, I couldn't believe my eyes, a very heavy fog was rolling in toward the hill on a nice 5-10 mile an hour wind.

This was our weather. Coming ever closer to the road, we could see the lights. Yes, the Germans had the lights on as they cruised back and forth every three to five minutes. We timed them. It was real exciting. All we had to do was wait and slip across the road just after the patrol car passed. The fog was getting ever thicker, as time wore on. We must make our move, now or never.

Whispering and laying in the ditch, it was decided that the next time a patrol car passed, together we would run across that road. Which we did.

Happy to have given the Germans the slip, we now must the next time a patrol car passed, together we would run across that road. Which we did.

Happy to have given the Germans the slip, we now must get to other business. It happened that we found ourselves in a field, in a great fog. About this time I noted the Sgt. had found a mound of dirt about 10 feet high. The mound was near the road, 50 yards, more or less. Now I could see what he was doing. Digging like mad with his knife, the cow beets began to appear.

We were very hungry and tired and cold. Soon all of us had our knives cutting out pieces of cow beets. Like ravenous, hungry dogs, we started to wolf them down. When you bit into them it made a loud crackling noise. Next as we swallowed the pieces, after chewing them, a wave of cramps came over the abdomen. Now there followed a deafening fart of escaping gas. Each mouthful was punctuated with an earsplitting fart. This worried me as

any German in hearing distance might discover our whereabouts. Caution was thrown to the winds, as we continued to cut and chew and fart. Hunger had to be satisfied regardless of the sound of escaping gas.

We heard a hell of a commotion. Yelling, shooting of small arms followed by shouts of "Kamarad", "Hande am kopf", "Kommen sie hier." This was followed by shouts of, "Don't shoot." The voices came in loud and clear. It seemed no more than 50 yards away in the fog. It was God awful close to our position in the adjacent field. We were startled and scared, as the eating of cow beets and farting came to a sudden stop. This was too close for comfort. Silently looking at each other near the 10 foot mound of cow beets, we put away our knives. After a hurried conference, it was decided to get out of here fast. We headed out of this place Indian file to go cross country away from the site of the capture of our comrades.

After an hour of walking as fast as we could the moon came out. This was fine. Now we used the North Star for direction. This course led us west to the American lines. We passed over field after field. Not being on a road, travel was difficult and very tiring. Soon our strength gave out, and we stopped for a much needed rest. "Where to go? What to do?" The only answers we came up with were, "Let's keep on going west.", and, "We must find a place to hide before daylight."

Our spirits were high, and, after the rest, we started again, field after field was crossed. Along about 3:00 AM a village came in sight. Carefully we approached it. All was quiet. "Damn it, a dog started to bark." This called for a detour around that dog. Thank God the moon was shining bright. It was beautiful to see all the houses and some kind of large building in the center. Also, a road was noted, that went through the town. We kept our distance, circling the whole place. The road led to a bridge, over a river. We were in luck, water had been found. Next we kind of large building in the center. Also, a road was noted, that went through the town. We kept our distance, circling the whole place. The road led to a bridge, over a river. We were in luck, water had been found. Next we decided to take a look at the river bank. There were two bridges, one highway and one railroad. Daylight was approaching. We needed a place to hide and keep warm. We stood on the river bank and looked around.

Toward the road, a barn or stone building was seen off in the shadows. Hurriedly we headed for the building. Soon all three of us arrived at our destination. Carefully walking completely around the stone building and looking for a door, we were rewarded. The door was found. We could not get in as it was locked. Being not discouraged, our search was continued. Coming around the other side of the building, there was no door on the river side. The search continued. We were in luck, the last side of the building had a split door. The bottom door went up about six feet and above it was an open door.



We couldn't believe our eyes. Who was going in the top door? It was too high for any of us to climb up and in. Being small, 5 feet, 5 inches and weighing only 98 pounds, I said, "Lift me up on your shoulders, give me a boost, and I'll go in and have a look. The rest of you are too big."

Now we were all so weak and done in from the long night, it was quite a struggle to get organized. The sick Lt. and the Texas Sgt. finally lifted my poor tired ass up on their shoulders. What would I find inside that building? Those were my thoughts as I finally got astride the top of their shoulders. Huffing and puffing from weakness, the top of the door was seized. Next I pulled my body up and let myself slide down, feet first. My feet found the floor; all was still and dark. I struck a match to have a look, hoping that farm animals would not trample me. To my happy surprise, the place was empty. Now in the middle of this large room there was a huge scale. I was satisfied that the place presented no further dangers for us at the moment.

Returning to the door, I pulled myself up. "Throw me a blanket and I will make it secure. Then you two can climb up and in here. It's OK in here." I talked in a low voice. Quickly, they threw me a blanket. Then they seized it and one at a time, making I thought a hell of a lot of noise as their feet kept hitting the boards as they struggled to climb up and into our new hiding place.

"Not bad." "At least we are out of the weather." We rolled out our blankets on the scale. Then I lay down in the middle with a Sgt. on one side and a Lt. on the other. Throwing two blankets over us, we got warm and fell into deep sleep. The long night walk through the fields and woods had completely exhausted us in mind and body. Darkness, quiet, and peace away from our pursuers for the present. Pleasant dreams of home and friends. Daylight was fast approaching as we lay deep in the arms of Morpheus, the god of dreams.

Darkness, quiet, and peace away from our pursuers for the present. Pleasant dreams of home and friends. Daylight was fast approaching as we lay deep in the arms of Morpheus, the god of dreams.

It was now daylight and we were still sleeping. Now, suddenly awakened by the sound of voices, we laid on the scales half asleep. Our eyes gazed up to the ceiling. "Eureka, a solution to our dilemma." First we were stricken with fear at the sound of German voices. Where to go and what to do? We couldn't go out of the building as they would see us.

The ceiling had a large hole, big enough for a man to pass through, and hide from his enemies. Pulling together our blankets, we picked up matches from the night entry. Again the Sgt. and the Lt. hoisted me up on their shoulders. I reached up into the hole in the ceiling. Gathering all my strength, a last push on my feet I disappeared into the

hole. Looking about, there was plenty of room for the three of us to hide. Coming back to the hole, I shook my head, "It's OK, throw up the blankets." Climbing and clinging to the blanket, my two comrades succeeded in making it up and into the hole.

We were very pleased with the new hiding place. Inspecting it, we could see out the eaves to the outside world. Also the far river bank could be observed.

We arrived at the new hiding place none too soon. About 30 minutes later in the morning, the working of the lock on the door alerted us to absolute silence. We watched the door with bated breath, as it started to open. First to appear was a German soldier. Behind him was a farmer. The farmer had a large pig. They weighed the pig and recorded the weight registered on the scale. Next a cow was weighed. Peering down from the ceiling we took in the whole show. The transactions being completed, the door was slammed shut and locked.

Now we could look out under the eaves and see our visitors disappear down the road. Our first big scare was over and we could now relax and plan our next move. Further inspection of our new quarters revealed it to be an abandoned bakery. There were two huge ovens of brick, with a connecting chimney. "Good place to make a fire and bake potatoes. No, No, they might see the smoke from our fire, so that idea is out."

My how interesting to observe people walking around. Further observation revealed we were in the midst of a German garrison. This called for extreme caution, no unnecessary noises. The weather was cold, but the rain did not hit us. Hunger pains beset us; thank God we do have water, also we can urinate without disturbing the peace.

One problem bedeviled us, but we were not aware of it. I was looking out from under the eaves. Directly under me, water, also we can urinate without disturbing the peace.

One problem bedeviled us, but we were not aware of it. I was looking out from under the eaves. Directly under me, and in my view was a German soldier walking arm in arm with his girl friend. Such a romantic scene, I was enthralled. At this point, Lt. Mac unbeknown to me lets out an earsplitting fart. The silence was broken. The German couple stopped dead in their tracks and embarrassingly, accusingly stared at each other. Each one thinking the other guilty of an unsocial mistake. "Ist du kranke?" "Fraulein?" "Excuse bitte."

I did not quite hear the whole conversation as they moved on hurriedly. I almost burst out in uncontrollable laughter, but a sense of fear stopped me. My two comrades were informed as to what happened. Our farting continued, but was prohibited so near the street.

We now began to contemplate our real serious problems. "How to cross the river? Where to get food?" It was simple, sleep during the day, forage at night. It was cold so we huddled together with our blankets to keep warm and conserve energy. We lay close together. After about three hours I began scratching and itching, never before had I had lice. Now I got them from the Sgt. Picking out lice kept me busy.

As the afternoon wore on, it was felt that the most important thing we had to do was get water and look for some potatoes. Distant sounds of airplanes and truck motors mingled with sounds of bombs and artillery in the quiet of the night. Our foraging had to be done after 12:00 PM. Along about 12:30 it was very dark and still. We carefully dropped down out of the hole in the ceiling to the floor of the bakery, all was quiet.

Next, the moon was shining through the top of the half door. Now with great difficulty I was pushed up on the shoulders of the Sgt. and the Lt. Once I got my hands on the door top, then pulling my body up and over, I proceeded to let myself down, dropping the last 3-4 feet to the ground. I looked around carefully and the coast was clear. "It's OK out here", I said in a tone of voice that could be heard on the other side of the wooden door. Each man proceeded to climb up the inside of the door, kicking and slipping until they succeeded in getting up and over, dropping to the soft ground below.

The moon continued to give us good light, enough so that we could slip into the dark shadows if need be. The danger of discovery and being found was always upper most in our minds. It felt wonderful to be out in the open on such a beautiful and quiet night. The first thing we did was slip down to the river bank and fill the canteen. We moved slowly, making our way to the river which was about 200 yards from the rear of our hiding place. On every reconnaissance, whether looking for food or escape routes, slip down to the river bank and fill the canteen. We moved slowly, making our way to the river which was about 200 yards from the rear of our hiding place. On every reconnaissance, whether looking for food or escape routes, we always made it a habit to travel in Indian file, so in Indian file about four to six feet apart, we approached the river. At this point I was in the lead. We had now reached our objective, the river.

Life giving water. I stooped down and took off the top of the canteen. The water looked black and dirty in the darkness, but had a silvery shine from reflection of the moonlight. Carefully taking my time, the canteen slowly filled up. Now we had a supply of water.

One could see across the river. It was at least 150 to 200 feet to the river bank on the other side. By the noise being made on the other side it seemed as if there was a highway directly across from where we stood. It was too

Time was passing fast and we had to get some food. So the Sgt. took the lead and we left the river bank. He had a lot of knowhow about German farming. After trudging about in the fields for half an hour, he located a potato mound. Down on all fours, we proceeded to fill our pockets with the potatoes.

It was now about 3:30 AM, time to form up and get back to our hiding place in the village bakery. Once more in Indian file, pockets full of potatoes, canteen full of water, and in better spirits than when we started our night forage expedition, we arrived at the half door of the bakery.

A short rest was in order. Being in weakened physical condition now began to make its appearance. The Sgt. and the Lt. gave me a boost so I could pull myself up and over the door. I swung down on to the floor and waited for those two people to follow me in. Soon after much huffing and puffing they made it in. Once more we rested for the final push up through the ceiling to our blankets and some more much needed rest. Well that was not too bad for the first night's forage. We had potatoes and water. Soon we all fell into a deep sleep, as we were completely pooped out.

When we woke up it was daylight and we could hear the sound of truck motors, also the distant sound of guns. Looking out under the eaves we observed German soldiers walking about the village street. Looking out the other side of the eaves, toward the river, we could plainly see a highway on the other side of the river. "There must be a bridge across that river some place." After thanking God for our good luck, it was decided to slip out again in the night and look for food. Eating raw potatoes and drinking polluted water had eased some of the terrible hunger pangs, to extreme cramps followed by passing noisy, stinking H2S gas.

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As we watched the people walk by our hideout, one of us would forget how close we were to the street, and unconsciously rip off a loud fart. People walking alongside the building would be startled, and stop to gaze around their fellows wondering who was guilty of this kind of unacceptable behavior. Whoever was looking down on the situation dared not break out in laughter.

Night would soon come, and we were all set to slip out some time after midnight. At the proper time we again slid down to the floor and out the top door to the ground below. We were now becoming a little more bold in our action. The moon was out, and we wasted no time heading out of the village to the nearby fields. After moving along cautiously in Indian file, we came to a fence. We crossed over to the

other side, looking about we spied a herd of sheep in the distance. Man, this was it, we would slip into the herd and slit the throat of a sheep and drink the blood. Sounded like a great idea. Quietly, in Indian file, we approached the sheep, hands were on our knives. Just as we got close to the sheep herd, and were about to grab one, all hell broke loose. Those damn sheep started to go Baa, Baaa as loud as they could. This would alert the shepherd, and get us into real trouble. There was nothing left to do but get the hell out of this unhappy situation.

So we quickly disappeared in the moonlit night, hoping that we had not awakened the local people. This area was now too dangerous so we had to detour a long way around to get back to the hiding place. However we did note a railway bridge, and also located the position of the highway bridge. We gained the hiding place without incident. Again, being very tired we fell fast asleep.

Things were moving faster than we thought. Waking up after several hours of sleep different sounds were heard. Tank motors, the rat a tat tat of Browning machine guns (Americans), the answering burup, burup, burup of German burp guns. The rounds seemed to be very distant coming from the other side of the river. We also noted more German troop movement in the village going across the highway bridge. We talked it all over, "Tonight we must investigate the railroad bridge. That seems to offer us a chance to get across the river". All day we waited for night to come, then for midnight. Munching on potatoes and drinking water, the day dragged on. No darkness came, then midnight and our chance to check on the bridge.

The weather was cold and damp. We still had a full moon, making it nice for night operations. Finally we looked at our watches and it was 12:00 midnight. Time to slip out of the hiding place and start to check out the possibility of maybe getting across the river. Once more we slipped down out of the ceiling to the cold floor below. looked at our watches and it was 12:00 midnight. Time to slip out of the hiding place and start to check out the possibility of maybe getting across the river. Once more we slipped down out of the ceiling to the cold floor below. After a great effort, we managed to pull our tired bodies up and over the bottom door of the bakery.

We heard much more movement of troops, and it was no longer quiet in the middle of the night. This fact caused us to be on the lookout, and very careful in our night movements. Again, the moon was nice and bright, some clouds passing over its face now and then.

We decided to investigate the highway bridge first. Forming up in our Indian file, off we went into the night. After making the detour around the village, we came in sight of the highway bridge. Carefully cutting across the fields we came close to the highway as it leads over the river bridge. We were not alone, there was one hell of a lot of

"This could be easy, if we fall in line with a German column and march across the bridge." After all it was dark. There was only one fly in the ointment. Leaving the Sgt. and the Lt. secluded, I told them to wait whilst I examined the chances of crossing the bridge. So I lay in the ditch by the side of the road. Soon along came a formation of German soldiers. This was my opportunity to get in line and come up real close to the guard on the bridge.

My heart was in my mouth, this was real exciting. Now I was able to amble up very close to the guard. Then I heard the familiar, "Langsam, Halte!" German for slow and stop. Then being only about four paces from the guard, the fourth man in front of me would give the "password". I strained my ears to no avail. I was unable to hear or understand what the password for the night was. So quickly and quietly I rolled over into the ditch. I repeated this performance three times, and each time I failed to get the pass word.

Disgusted and tired and scared, I slipped back through the field, and explained to my comrades what had happened to me. They understood. So we left the area.

Back in Indian file we started to make tracks in the direction of the railroad bridge. The night air was clear and cool, the moon continued to shine. Crossing over the beet fields it was much more peaceful and quiet. At least we were away from moving German Army units. We stopped and took a much needed rest. After the rest, it seemed that the railroad bridge was not too far away. The plan was Indian file, I was to be in the lead, the Sgt. four or five paces in my rear, and the Lt. four or five paces behind him. Also there would be no talking. We would approach the embankment leading up to the railroad bridge slowly and cautiously. Lt. Mac was to put the towel in his mouth as we wanted no coughing. We were all in very high spirits, the moon was shining, the night was clear and calm... "If only we could leading up to the railroad bridge slowly and cautiously. Lt. Mac was to put the towel in his mouth as we wanted no coughing. We were all in very high spirits, the moon was shining, the night was clear and calm. "If only we could get across the river, then we could contact the United States Army. All set and off we go."

I started up the gravel embankment of some 10 feet, and was just about to get on top of the railroad track, when Providence saved my life from certain death. Just as I was about to get on top of the rail bed at the bridge, a cloud came over the moon. This caused momentary darkness at that place. The Sgt. slipped up on me from behind. He put his hand over my mouth, gently, but firmly we rolled down the embankment into the bushes and the quiet darkness of the night. His face was white as chalk. He whispered, "Didn't you hear the safety catch on that rifle? The German guard was about to shoot you." The Sgt. had saved my life, by his quick thinking and action. Thank God for the cloud that

Now after that scare, we stayed in the shadows of the trees and decided to get the hell out of there and fast. It was now getting toward dawn. It had been a long night. We were so terribly hungry.

"What to do? Too far away from the hideout. We are too weak to go that far. Food must be found and pretty soon, and contact with the German underground, if there is such a thing as that in Hitler's Germany. If not, there is only one course left, surrender to the garrison. No, first we must make at least one or two more tries at getting food by theft or pity."

So we headed back to the village. Carefully circling around we came upon a cow barn. All cow barns, hay lofts, and farm houses were built together in the same unit. So one had to be careful in getting into the hay loft without being seen. Luck was with us as we wandered into the barn and quietly climbed up into the hay. It was now about 4:00 AM. The hay was soft and warm. We lay side by side and soon fell into a deep sleep.

After about two hours of sleep, it was 6:00 AM. Suddenly we heard noises and we were awakened. Being very silent we looked down from on top of the hay. By the gods, we were in the quarters of part of the German garrison. We couldn't believe our eyes. Two German soldiers were about 20 feet below our vantage point on top of the hay. They were proceeding to get dressed for reveille. Man! What a sight! When the dressing, shaving, and putting on of the uniform was complete, off they went, leaving their quarters to us.

We continued to look down where there was a wagon and some baled hay. Our eyes began to get as big as saucers. Why? There before us on the wagon was a nice big loaf of bread. Left by the two German soldiers. I looked at the Sgt. He looked at me. "Who is going down there and get some baled hay. Our eyes began to get as big as saucers. Why? There before us on the wagon was a nice big loaf of bread. Left by the two German soldiers. I looked at the Sgt. He looked at me. "Who is going down there and get that bread?"

The two of us could contain ourselves no longer. A decision had to be made, and fast, before those two German soldiers return. This opportunity was not to be lost. "Sgt. will you go down there and get that bread," I ask. "No Sir," replies the Sgt.. "Why not," I retort. "They will capture me," says the Sgt. We do not ask the Lt. as he is too weak and sick. Now I try to pacify the Sgt., and reason with him. "OK Sgt., let me make you a deal. "What kind of a deal," asks the excited Sgt. "If you will go down to that wagon and get that loaf of bread and heave it up here, I'll take the next chance in getting food," said I to the Sgt. "One more thing, if they capture you in the act of taking the bread say you are alone." The Sgt. considered

the proposition for a few minutes and said, "It's OK Lt., I'll go."

"No time must be lost, it might already be too late. Quickly and quietly, like a cheetah, he slides down the hay stack. There he goes. He is down on the floor. Now he is approaching the wagon where the bread is standing. Like an All-American quarterback in football, the Sgt.'s great hands seize the bread. Here comes the forward pass aimed at me and Lt. Mac laying up in the hay 20 feet high." No time was lost, the Sgt. climbed as fast as he could. In less time than it takes to tell, we were all three together. Touchdown!, with a loaf of life giving bread, compliments of the German Army.

A sharp knife was produced. Marking the loaf into three equal pieces, the cutting was completed. It tasted like cake. Oh!, how delicious. The first bread we had since leaving the prison camp. After this lovely meal we fell asleep in the hay loft, but not for long.

We heard the German soldiers loud and clear. They were shouting at each other, "You stole my bread!" "I left it here on the wagon." "No." "I did not.", replied the other confused soldier. The argument went on hot and heavy. We were tempted to laugh out loud but dared not. We also noted a displaced person, as a hired hand, pitching hay and cleaning up manure. He looked like a Russian.

Soon the German soldiers stopped their accusing each other of stealing the loaf of bread. They put their sleeping quarters in order and left the barn. All was quiet for a short time. Things were getting hot, more troop movements were heard. The shrapnel from American artillery started to buzz around the roof of the barn. "We are going to have to vacate this place and soon." We consulted on what to do. The hunger pangs and the fear of being recaptured were uppermost in our minds. started to buzz around the roof of the barn. "We are going to have to vacate this place and soon." We consulted on what to do. The hunger pangs and the fear of being recaptured were uppermost in our minds.

So carefully out of the hayloft, we dropped down to the floor. The coast was clear for the moment. Opening the barn door, the path led to a chicken yard, and also a wood pile. I told the Sgt. and the Lt. it was my turn to take the next chance and try to contact the local people who lived here. It was Easter Monday, just about noon. The hunger pangs and fear were almost unbearable. Quickly and in Indian file, the three of us proceeded to enter the chicken yard. I noted there were some old gunny sacks lying about on the ground. There were also some chicken coops. The Sgt. and the Lt. went behind the chicken coops and laid down. After they were flat on the ground, I covered them up with a couple of sacks so they were completely hidden from the outside world.



So far all was quiet and peaceful. The woodpile was located in the center of the chicken yard. It was rounding and about six feet high. This looked like an excellent place to secrete myself, and await for things to happen. I knew the chickens must be fed and the eggs must be gathered some time in the day. I selected a comfortable place in the wood pile. Sitting half upright in the woodpile, I covered myself up with two gunny sacks. Completely camouflaged I waited for the feeder of the chickens.

I had done all that was possible, so I commenced praying to Him who gives all. After about an hour of solitude, my ears perked up. Footsteps, the familiar, "Chick, Chick, Chick, here Chick Chick." Turning my head in the direction of the sound, I saw a woman. She was dressed in black with a large apron about her. Her hands were throwing feed to the chickens.

"I'm enthralled just watching her. I must wait for the right moment so as not to scare her away from me. Will she give the alarm to the nearby garrison. This must be played real cool. Patiently, I wait, now she is coming closer. Luck is with me, she is heading straight for the woodpile and me."

At last she was only two feet away. I sprang out of the woodpile directly at her side. She raised her hands above her head in fright, "Lieber Gott" Dear God she cried out in fear. "Nichts angst, nichts angst" Do not fear, do not fear, I said in my best German. That did the trick. She remained calm and did not panic.

"Ich bin ein Amerikanish Officier kriegsgefangenen er is sehr kranke." " Ich musse essen haben, ah ja jetz." I am an American officer prisoner of war who is very sick. I must have something to eat right now.

I told her the war was lost and would soon be over. She agreed, but I could see doubt in her eyes. So I reached must have something to eat right now.

I told her the war was lost and would soon be over. She agreed, but I could see doubt in her eyes. So I reached down in my pocket and gave her a bar of soap. A smile came over her face.

" Can you feed me?" "Yes" Will you turn me in to the German soldiers?" "No" Then I told her, I had two shy comrades. "Will you feed them too?" "Yes" At this point, I called my two friends, the Sgt. and the Lt., and they appeared from their hiding places. We all smiled and hoped the old lady would bring us back some much needed food. She told us to wait in the chicken yard, "Ich wille zuruck kommen mit da essen" I will return soon with something to eat.

Thank God we were going to get something to eat. All we could do was wait and hope that she would return. The

Lt. and the Sgt. didn't think she would come back with food. They were doubting Thomases. Who could blame them. We were enemies of the Fatherland.

I could see compassion in her eyes, and confidence in her womanly kindness. After about a half an hour wait the woman reappeared. She was carrying a basket. Also with her was a pretty girl, about 15 years old. This was her daughter. She had blue eyes and blonde hair. Seemed very shy but friendly. To give her more confidence in us, I proceeded to give her also some "seife" soap. "Danke" Thanks, she said. I had made a friend.

Now the old lady opened the basket. Our eyes were big as saucers. In the basket were three colored Easter eggs, three pieces of raw bacon, some bread. Like ravenous wolves we proceeded to devour the vittles. It was like putting ethyl gasoline in a car that was just about out of gasoline. Gad!, it was good. You could feel the energy return to your starving body.

Then we began to talk. "Could you hide us in your house? How far were the Americans away from town. How many German soldiers were in the town?" Then came the answers. "There were 20 Germans in the garrison. The Americans were about 30 kilometers across the river. No they could not hide us in the house. Her husband would kill her." She said, "Go into the woods and hide." Come back the next night and meet me at the gate and I will have food for you."

We were afraid to head for the woods as it was cold and we might get caught. After filling up on the food, I told her we would come back the following night and meet her at the gate. Things looked a little bit better. She had also given us some aspirin tablets for our colds. This was another indication that she was sympathetic to our cause.

So rather than go into the cold woods, we decided to give her some aspirin tablets for our colds. This was another indication that she was sympathetic to our cause.

So rather than go into the cold woods, we decided to slip back to the hideout and return the following night. We got back to the bakery without incident. It was a peaceful night sleeping, but the noise of tank motors and machine guns across the river had greatly increased. Things were getting very hairy.

We woke up the next morning and could hear strange sounds. Things had happened during our sleep. Carefully crawling up to the eaves we looked out. Yes, we had trouble, lots of company, and the sounds of trucks and jeeps racing down the highway across the river. We could plainly see this from our vantage point high up on the second floor of the bakery. Our hiding place was now a prison.

Looking down, on the ground below us was a shocking sight. The German Infantry had dug fox holes, while we

slept, around the side of the bakery that faced the river. Crouching down in their fox holes they were shooting at the American trucks and jeeps passing down the highway on the other side of the river. You could hear the noise of tank motors, the chatter of Browning machine guns, and the answering replies of the German burp guns and that familiar sound of the terrifying German 88 mm gun.

"This ungodly position. Now what do we do?. We can't get out, the back door is in plain view of the German fox holes. Yes, by the gods, they are real German soldiers. They have got their machine guns and rifles pointing across that river and the highway. Now our attention is riveted on our tormentors. Just like the movies scenes from the war pictures only difference is its reality."

We were transfixed by what we saw. Suddenly a truck would come into view on the other side of the river. All at once, Burup, Burup, they were shooting at that GI truck. The truck shifted gears and ran away as fast as it could. It seemed to get by without being disabled. Man, that was close. We looked at each other, helpless to get out of this place. We had to wait for night no matter what happened. Gloom settled down over us.

About 3:00 PM the noise of battle and combat got louder. Then we detected the hum of a small observation airplane motor. My God, it was an artillery spotter plane, with a forward observer. Our hideout was the lone building, a land mark for a base point adjustment for some battalions of the American field artillery across the river. Our hearts sank. We were artillery officers and we knew what this meant. A death sentence to us as we were hiding on the base point. We beheld each other in disbelief. Maybe they would fire at some other base point. We did not want to believe the awful truth.

base point. My hand in my pocket and got out my Rosary. The would fire at some other base point. We did not want to believe the awful truth.

I put my hand in my pocket and got out my Rosary. The most powerful instrument in my possession. Quietly I began to pray. First I said the Apostle's Creed, then I made an Act of Contrition.

The Little Five continued to slowly circle the bakery. The German soldiers got way down in their fox holes. They too knew what was coming from across that river. We got real close together and remained silent. Our ears were straining to hear that terrible little sound.

Part IV, A March in the Snow, Robert P. Fleege, D.D.S.,

"A howitzer of the field artillery goes bang, like a muffled rifle shot. Then comes the whistling noise and the whining of the death dealing projectile."

"That awful shrapnel. Will they use fuse quick or fuse delay or just plain old proximity fuse, set to go off 17 feet above the ground? Maybe they will use death dealing white phosphorus or smoke."

All these thoughts were going through our minds. We were too scared to talk much. All this far towards our escape, and then this predicament. We were like rats in a trap. There was no way out of this death house. Once the artillery started to adjust using our building as a base point we were as good as dead. By all the laws of mathematical dispersion, "One over and one short, then closing the bracket, they cannot miss".

We continued to hear the motor of the little L5, observation plane. The Germans in their fox holes were going deeper and were very quiet.

Now the observation airplane was directly above our hiding place. Our hearts beat faster. "No, hopefully this will not be the Base Point Target, for the artillery, no, no, no."

Then it happened. Ping, a muffled sound like a very distant shotgun blast, but very familiar to a seasoned artillery forward observer directing fire. Then came the hollow screaming whine of the projectile, and the earsplitting "whoom bang" terrifying crash as the explosive hit the ground. artillery forward observer directing fire. Then came the hollow screaming whine of the projectile, and the earsplitting "whoom bang" terrifying crash as the explosive hit the ground.

We were the base point. The living target. Encased under the roof of the bakery. Base guns for 13 battalions of artillery were adjusting on us. We embraced each other and started to cry like babies.

"There is no escape, we will be killed here and now. I take out my rosary in my hands. I am a Catholic. I teach the Lt. and the Sgt., the Hail Mary. We pray out loud. No human can describe our prayers, our feelings. We appeal to God to save us from certain death. We are in his hands. By all the laws of dispersion and physics, we haven't a chance."

The artillery continued to fire. We kept on praying

and crying with the tears falling from our eyes. We counted the rounds as they fell all around the building. Missing the roof by inches. We smell the cordite and the powder as it erupts in smoke around the target. So far we counted 35 rounds. Suddenly the American artillery stopped their adjustment.

"Each round takes years off our lives. The God above saved us from certain death. All is silent."

Peering out from under the eaves we saw the German soldiers were still crouching in their foxholes. Some had been hit. They were helping the wounded. The rest of the soldiers were leaving, they had had enough.

We said a prayer of thanksgiving. Talking over our narrow escape from death, it was decided to leave the hideout forever. So as night came we slipped out the back door, never to return to this place again. It was far too dangerous to stay there.

The darkness of night came fast. There was no moon. We moved out in Indian file, stayed close together so we wouldn't get lost. We could hardly see the man in front of us.

This was good. It improved our situation. No one would see our movements toward the chicken yard. The words I last heard from the the German old lady kept constantly in my mind, "Wen ist furdunkelhed, du zuruck kommen hier. Meer essen haben." " When it is dark, you come back to the gate of the chicken yard and I will wait and have food."

Upper most in our minds was the question, "How are we going to get from the German combat troops defending themselves and to the attacking American forces?"

The noises of battle were getting louder and closer to ~~going to get from the German combat troops defending~~ themselves and to the attacking American forces?"

The noises of battle were getting louder and closer to each other. We stopped for a rest. Again I put the question to the Sgt. and the Lt., "Do you think the old lady will meet us at the gate in the dark?" The answers, "No, no, she will turn us into the garrison. We cannot trust her." "Well when we get to the gate, you two hide," I said, "I have a gut feeling she will be there, So far the Germans have not started to apprehend us. It is our only chance as we are starving to death, and besides that I want to know how the battle is going. Do you have any other plan that could get us out of this desperate situation?" "No", came the reply. "OK, let's head for the gate. Just before we get to the gate you two people stay back and hide. If I have news or goodluck I will come back and get you."

Our hurried conference over, in the pitch dark we resumed the march to the path that led to the fateful gate

I could tell by their voices that they had no confidence in the old German lady, or that she would even be there waiting for us. My excitement knew no bounds as on we plodded. At last the path to the chicken yard was reached. Now my heart began to beat faster as the moment of truth would soon come. It was very quiet in the darkness. A halt was made, we had arrived as far as the Sgt. and the Lt. were going to go.

We whispered to each other. "You fellows take cover and make no noise. I will take the chance and start up the path and contact the old German lady". I stopped in the middle of the cow path and said a last silent prayer. Noiselessly, like out squirrel hunting, I worked my way ever closer to the gate. It was so dark I could not see my hand in front of my face. All the better, no one could see me. My ears were straining. Would I be ambushed?

Now at last I was at the gate. My hand reached inside for the latch. Yes, it was there. I listened for noises. Faintly, I began to hear foot steps. They were getting real close.

Was it her foot steps? I could contain myself no longer. Lightly I called out in the inky blackness of the night, "Ja, Ja". Then comes the hushed answer, "Ja, Ja". My hand was clasped by a warm, soft, friendly female hand. A great sigh of relief came over me. I was right with my faith in human nature. A surge of hope enveloped me. She released my hand. The gate opened

Yet another surprise awaited me. It was not the old lady, it was the pretty little blonde, blue eyed girl whom I had given the bar of soap. The old lady's daughter. She had a basket full of bread and sausage. I did not call my comrades yet.

I must first find out what she knows about the fighting and combat that is swirling about us. The little comrades yet.

I must first find out what she knows about the fighting and combat that is swirling about us. The little girl smiles in the darkness. Now, I began to question her. "Wohin die Deutscher soldaten?" Where are the German soldiers? "They are still here," she answers. "Wohin die Amerikanische soldaten?" "They are 20 kilometers away, but have not crossed the river yet," she replies. "You are safe here with me," she said.

"Wait and I will get my comrades", I said. Going back down the path in the dark, I whistled. "It's OK, we have food, come on up to the gate." Two figures emerged out of the bush. They were pathetic looking characters, dirty, unshaven, forlorn. The Lt. had the towel around his dirty neck. Their eyes had that hollow, sunken distraught appearance.

follow me", I replied. After a short time we gained the gate where the little girl was waiting with the basket of sausage and bread. It was dark, but a light moon showed a dull light through light clouds.

When we met, she opened the basket and we started to eat. She smiled at me and watched us devour the food like hungry dogs. After a short time, the food was gone. "Now what do we do? We must have a place to stay away from the cold and the German soldiers. For the moment we had no plans. I was perplexed".

I knew the German garrison was still in the town. As I stood there gazing at the girl, wondering what to do, out of the blue she said, "Kommen mit mir." I was aghast. "Should I or should I not. What did she have in mind? So close to escape and yet so far. Will she trap me? Good God, what to do? I hesitate for a moment. Then I say to myself, take a chance, go ahead with her."

I was still terrified. She opened the gate and I followed her down the village street. It was in the darkness of a cloudy and moonlit night. We hadn't gone 10 steps when she froze in her tracks and got up tight against a building, in the shadows, and made not a sound. Godfree out of no where came a "cloop cloop" of foot steps down the street. It was a German soldier. He walked right by us in the shadows. I almost died of fright. We waited until he passed. She turned her pretty blonde head, crept up to me, and whispered, "Schnell, schnell," Quick, quick, she said. "Kommen sie" Follow me. It took no urging on my part, after about 10 more steps down the street, she hurriedly opened a door.

I followed her every move, closing the door behind me. I found myself in a barn with two pretty girls and two of the biggest oxen in all Germany. The lantern light shone brightly. It was warm and secure.

I followed her every move, closing the door behind me. I found myself in a barn with two pretty girls and two of the biggest oxen in all Germany. The lantern light shone brightly. It was warm and secure.

The oxen were tied with their heads facing the manger. They were munching hay. The girls were dressed in skirts and blouses, along with aprons. They looked so cute and carefree. Typical teen agers, friendly and smiling. We were standing behind the animals and off to the side. The space was about 5x12 feet. Plenty of room to talk and move about in. As I sized up the situation, this seemed like a good place to stay for the time being. It was dark and cold outside. The body heat from the huge oxen warmed up the small enclosure.

The two girls kept on smiling, and I was trying to talk to them in German. Cramps in my belly were just uncontrollable. I ripped off one huge fart after another.

To make a more friendly gesture, I proceeded to give the girls some more soap. Little did I know that it would come in mighty handy later.

Now came the time for action. I asked the girls to go back to the gate and bring my comrades to this place, out of the cold. One of the girls left the barn and disappeared in the direction of the gate. In about 10 minutes she returned. In her company was the Sgt. and the Lt. They were quite amazed at our good fortune.

Now took place one of the most comical, realistic scenes, unbelievable. You had to be there to appreciate the goings on. The Sgt. and the Lt. spoke no German. I commenced talking to the girls in German about the German troops and the American advance.

As I began my dissertation I farted. "How many soldiers were in town? "Boom ya Boom" Almost every sentence was punctuated by "ya Boom" loud and clear. The girls started to giggle. My colon was filled to the brim with potato gas. As my conversation proceeded, the Lt. made the mistake of standing directly behind an ox's anus. After about two minutes, in this position, the ox opened up his bowels and hurled a huge mass of oxen shit upon the face of the Lt. He was a true man of pure, clear, brown oxen shit. The like of which no oxen could have scored a better target.

The two girls, the Sgt. and myself were in the midst of this explosion. We roared with laughter and mirth, followed by huge farts from me and the Sgt. We continued to laugh with great gusto, farting to no end. It was like a scene from Dante's Inferno. Shit instead of fire; mirth instead of fire.

After the girls recovered themselves, they proceeded to clean up poor Lt. Mac. Taking water and soap and some towels, they scrubbed and scrubbed to relieve him of his

After the girls recovered themselves, they proceeded to clean up poor Lt. Mac. Taking water and soap and some towels, they scrubbed and scrubbed to relieve him of his shitty appearance. Soon his face was wiped and the old coat had only the stain of pure oxen shit. Soon the Lt. was reasonably clean.

We had a place to stay for the night. Our situation was getting more desperate by the hour. The sounds of combat were getting louder by the hour. Even in the compounds of the barn we had no other hiding place.

"Soon dawn would come, then what?" All these problems had to be solved come dawn. The girls had left, we were alone. They had promised to come back at daylight with more information, concerning the Germans and American, and how the battle was progressing.



It was a very apprehensive night, being on guard, hoping no German soldiers would show up. "So close and yet so far to safety. Come daylight some hard decisions would be made as to what to do to stay alive and free. All night long we stayed on the alert. The terrifying hours dragged by. Every now and then a piece of shrapnel zinged around the old barn.

The Americans were getting closer and closer. The terror in our hearts was increasing, as time passed. Soon it was daylight. The old lady made her appearance along with her, much to our surprise, was her husband. A man about 50 years old. His manner of attire was dark pants and work shirt with a coat of black wool. He smiled at us, and told me in German, the Americans are only 20 kilometers away. He seemed to be glad the war would soon be over. With that pronouncement the old man took his leave.

Things were getting much worse. We still had no place to go or hide. Again I asked the old lady if we could hide in her house. She shook her head, No. Then she turned on her heel and left. "Go into the woods and hide," she said and then continued to walk away. This was impossible as the town was still full of German soldiers.

"Now what to do?" The little girl stayed with us, she saw and heard what went on. We were shaking in our boots, we just had to find a place of safety and security, and fast. Time was running out. She could see our desperate predicament. She knew we had no place to run without getting killed or captured. The fighting was furious across the river. We could hear the crescendo of tanks, artillery, machine guns, and GI trucks.

The Germans were fighting a rear guard action and they were desperate that the Americans not be allowed across that bridge.

The Germans were fighting a rear guard action and they were desperate that the Americans not be allowed across that bridge.

I looked at the little girl; I pleaded with her, "Please, please find us a place of refuge from the American artillery and the German infantry." God Bless Her, she was equal to the task at hand. Looking at me with those big blue eyes, it was our only chance that she knew what to do and fast.

Then it happened, "Quick, quick come with me", she said. So like the "three Musketeers", Indian file, we ran after her. She ran down the path, after about 40 yards she suddenly came to a halt. As we came upon her, she pointed to a pig sty. Some one had thrown clean straw over the pig manure. She pointed to more clean straw which we threw into the pen. Now this prevented us from getting full of fresh

Feet first, we backed into our new hovel. We proceeded to cover ourselves with straw so no one could see us and hopefully the "oink, oink" sounds could be made to imitate pigs if our place of refuge was investigated. After about five minutes we got settled. Our heads were camouflaged with straw, but we could see out. To the outside world it was just a pig sty.

Thank God for the fast thinking of that little girl. She stayed close by swinging her little apron like she was feeding the pigs. What a sight to watch. She reported the progress of the battle, to me in German. We did not know what to do next. The wise little girl was solving our problem for the time being. About every five minutes she approached the pig sty, swinging her cute little apron.

"Bitte, essen haben." I called to her in a muffled voice. "Ja, ja," she answered and then disappeared. After about 15 minutes, back she came. There was a bulge under the apron. "Prancing to and fro, like in the act of slopping the hogs." Just as she got directly in front of us, down she stooped, popping out from under the apron came a small washbasin like bowl. Without changing her rhythm, the basin was shoved in to us. Our eager, hungry hands seized it. What a pleasant surprise. It was filled with sauerkraut and sausage. Post haste our spoons came from our pockets. Man was that good. We became greasy from ear to ear.

We lay there in great fear, wondering what would happen next? Again the little girl approached us hogs. "The German garrison is leaving town," she reported. Good news, she disappeared, oh how happy we were. Soon we would be free, we thought, as the sounds of combat swirled around us. "I'll be back, 'zuruck'," later were her last words.

About half an hour later we were quietly laying in the straw, waiting for some more news. From out of nowhere, "I'll be back, 'zuruck'," later were her last words.

About half an hour later we were quietly laying in the straw, waiting for some more news. From out of nowhere, without the slightest warning, a German soldier stuck his head in the pig sty and said "hello American, hello American," and waited for an answer. We just froze, made not a move, nor a sound. After about five minutes, he left the pig pen. We were in shock. Soon our breathing returned to normal. Would the soldier come back?

This was the closest call to being recaptured so far. How or why did that German soldier put his head in that pig sty? Did he know we were there? There was nothing to do but wait, we dared not to break our cover. There we lay contemplating the future, so near and yet so far, death around us everywhere.

The small arms fire was getting closer and louder, also

the noise of tank motors. Amidst this confusion of battle, things got suddenly quiet. As we lay in the pig sty wondering what to do, the silence was broken. Boom! A tremendous roar shook the ground. "What was that terrible noise?" After a few minutes we recovered our senses. Peeping out of the straw of the pig sty, I could see that sweet, young, blonde headed girl. Yes, she was making her way up the path toward the pig sty, swinging her little white apron in the morning sun.

What a wonderful sight to behold. When she got close to our hideout I said in German, "Was war die Boom?". She smiled and said, "The Germans have blown up the bridge across the river." Also she said, "The entire German garrison has left the village."

That was the best news that we had heard yet. Upon receipt of that information, we crawled out of the dirty pig sty and stood up on our feet. It was great to breath God's fresh air and see the sun shine. Taking a look around we saw no one in the street. We decided it was now or never. "Let us make a running break for the American Lines." As we ran down the village street, the German people looked at us in utter amazement. To us we were glad to leave having been in the village for five days foraging only at night. Running as fast as we could we looked like the "three Musketeers".

Soon we gained the end of the road which led directly to the bridge. Yes, the sweet little German girl was correct. There lay the bridge, the center section, blown and dropped, laying in the water. Both ends were in the middle of the river, but the far ends were intact. So we could go down one side and climb back up the other side.

It was mighty steep, both ways, from a side view it looked like a great V, as both sides dipped into the center of the river. Now full steam ahead, we charged down the fallen bridge. Like a couple of nimble monkeys we negotiated the wrecked girders of steel and concrete, and in less time than it takes to tell we arrived on the American side of the bridge.

Now the trick was not to get shot by the attacking American Infantry. All the time we were crossing the bridge, small arms fire was crackling to beat the band. Soon as we got to the American side we dove down on the ground.

We took a look, for one small false move and we would be dead. We kept down, then we spotted an American Infantry patrol of the 3rd Infantry Division. A young Lt., just out of OCS, was in charge.

Now they were very close and closing in on us. We must act fast, and this we did. Rising up out of our concealed position we shouted, "Please don't shoot, we are American POW's". The patrol stopped, I informed the Lt. in charge who we were, I offered to tell him what was on the other side of the river.

He was too preoccupied, exhorting his men, "Don't bunch up!!" Thank God that was over for the moment.

So, leaving the Lt. to his patrol duties, we found ourselves still in the middle of a combat zone. The traffic on the road was fast and heavy as the Germans kept taking pot shots at the moving vehicles.

Acting as fast as we knew how, a jeep was flagged down. The driver was from my home town. What a piece of good luck. Old Paddy loaded us up in the jeep and stepped on the gas. He took us to Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, which was in a still burning little town that had just been captured. The town was a mess of wreckage, some windows had white sheets still hanging out of the windows.

The first thing I did when the jeep stopped at the headquarters was dismount. Collecting my thoughts, I looked for a church. About 100 feet away was a church, the outside of the stone building was very shabby and seemed to be very old. Upon opening the door a dismal sight greeted my poor tired eyes. Some of the roof timbers were hanging down, the pews were littered with dust and grime. The high altar and crucifix, with all the dirt and debris, gave forth a very serene, quiet, and peaceful dignity. Then I knelt down in one of the dusty pews. The tears started to fall from my eyes. I commenced to thank God for sparing me and saving my life inside a dying Germany. After some time in peaceful silence with my Creator, a tremendous burden had been lifted from my body and soul. Happily refreshed I left the church and presented myself to the Colonel in charge of the Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, United States Army. silence with my Creator, a tremendous burden had been lifted from my body and soul. Happily refreshed I left the church and presented myself to the Colonel in charge of the Headquarters, 3rd Infantry Division, United States Army.

The Colonel was a big, red faced man about 45 years old. After hearing our story of imprisonment and our recent escape, he was moved to compassion. He immediately issued orders to have us sent to the nearest field hospital. An ambulance was brought for us, we got in it, and after some time arrived at the field hospital.

The doctors and nurses looked at us with almost tears in their eyes. I weighed 98 pounds, soaking wet. My skin flaked off like powder. The poor nurses had a terrible time trying to get a needle in my hide. They gave us food. We could not eat it.

Our stomach's were all shriveled up. Only small

amounts of food at a time. They were so gentle and kind. God love the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. They were tops.

Now I was sent to the barber shop. Approaching the barber chair, I mounted up on my now bony little ass. My face was all sunken in along with my eyes. The beard was long and sort of a urine, yellow color. At this point in time, the barber accosted me. He started to laugh when he saw me. Looking at my appearance he began to say, "Pardon me Lt., for laughing at you, but I can't help it. You look just like Christ before they crucified Him." After that remark we both laughed, I told him that I had just come back from Hell. With that he proceeded to give me my first shave in 30 days, and my first haircut since that Russian cut off all of my hair in the middle of January, and I almost froze to death.

After several days of rest and medical treatment we were taken to the small airport. C47's, those flying boxcars of mercy, were landing and taking off about every 30 minutes. They were flying wounded German POW along with wounded GI's to England for further treatment. We were quickly put on board.

It was a sad sight to see so many young American and German boys with their limbs gone or other serious wounds. Now we had a crowded plane, so I was invited up front to sit in the copilots seat. Having served some time as a flying cadet this made me feel quite at home.

So without further adieu we took off for Swindon, England. Soon the plane was crossing France. About that time I got the urge to urinate. The pilot pointed out to me the tube right by my side. Now what went wrong, I'll never know, but I can never forget it either. When I finished my urination and was in the act of replacing the tube, all that nice fesh urine blew straight in to my face. So I really got pissed on. The pilot had one hell of a good belly laugh. know, but I can never forget it either. When I finished my urination and was in the act of replacing the tube, all that nice fesh urine blew straight in to my face. So I really got pissed on. The pilot had one hell of a good belly laugh.

I asked the pilot what he was going to do when the war was over? "Be a cab driver," he said, none too soon, "If I live". Just then two fighters flashed by. Up ahead one could see the English Channel. After a few minutes we landed at the Hospital Air Port.

Put back in the hospital on a careful diet, we were on our way to recovering our health. Thank God, the War for us was over for the present.