Jim McPhee - My Story

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Several persons have asked me to write down my experiences in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the World War Two. As in most experiences, there was good and bad, but the bad ones were very bad, which, I believe made me reluctant to share them with anyone. Perhaps I felt a little guilty because I survived intact and so many of my friends lost their lives. Especially I feel badly about the members of my crew, who perished [except one, the pilot], and seeing that I was there to protect the aircraft, I felt that I had failed them.

A few years ago, I attended the Allied Air Force reunion at the Royal York hotel, met many who had been through the same battle and for the same reason. Talking with these veterans about the whole experience, and hearing some of the feelings they have experienced, made me

realize that we all tried to do the best job we could, and the bad outcomes were not all our fault. People we care about, need to know the personal stories of the war, to counteract some of the misinformation the so-called historians [as those at the National Film Board] have spread through such as "The Valor and the Horror", and "Death by Moonlight".

March 18, 1943, I turned eighteen years old, and the following week I went by train from Sault Ste. Marie to North Bay, and enlisted in the RCAF. Of course, I talked this over with my parents, who certainly tried to dissuade me. My education would have to be put on hold. It was mid term grade twelve, which would not be completed until the end of June. However, I was finding school very difficult as I had to make enough money to pay my room board and books. I was working at the Algoma Steel plant as a so-called "Victory worker" putting in about thirty-six hours weekly. Probably the reason I was determined to go to war was for adventure, or to escape the hard time I was having (working and going to school) or it was general restlessness. There was the pressure of being young and able-bodied, so that the expectation was that one would go to defend the country. Who knows?

I was a member of the Air Cadets, which met once a week at the Sault armories, where we wore a uniform, paraded, and learned about flying and aircraft. Some of the members of the Air Cadets had joined, and more talked about it. There were several young men met at the recruiting office, along with me, transported to the railway station and were on our way to North Bay Induction centre.

We arrived early in the morning, spent the day having medical examinations, having educational documents scanned, and then were back on the train for Toronto the same evening. From Union Station, we were taken to the Exhibition grounds in Toronto, by an NCO who showed us how to walk in a military form. Our first home was the live stock building, the "Sheep Pen" to be exact, which was the "Reception Centre", set up to take in the raw recruits. We were confined to barracks for the first two weeks while we received our uniforms, medical examinations, induction lectures, and introduced to military discipline.

Transition from civilian life was a bit of a shock especially for those who had lived a more sheltered life than I had. Actually, I had left home in 1941 to go to school in Burlington so that I had knocked around a bit and did not suffer the terrible home sickness that some experienced. If you have been to the Exhibition in Toronto, you will be aware of the huge buildings with open floor space. In one huge building there were six thousand men in double deck bunks. Military life consists of large numbers of rules and regulations, which had to be obeyed, and as long as a person complied, it was not unpleasant. Having survived the induction process, we were moved to the "Horse Palace", next to a large group of young men from Quebec, who were there to learn English. As a matter of fact they were referred to as the School of English. At the same time they were going through basic training or "boot camp", physical, educational, and military drill.

About half way through basic training, I came down with tonsillitis and lymphadenitis, requiring a few days in sick bay. By the time I recovered, my group had moved on, and I was an odd man out, so I was posted to Brandon Manitoba to complete my manning depot stint. Toronto manning depot was an enjoyable experience, the camaraderie, the physical challenge of basic training, and the excitement of the big city was great. The food was good, beds comfortable, and visits with my relatives very pleasant. My aunt Marion White and my uncle John McPhee, my father's siblings lived in Toronto, and always welcomed me to their home.

In Brandon life continued much as it had been in Toronto. The trip from Toronto to Brandon, through Northern Ontario bush country, along Lake Superior and the lake country from Thunder Bay was very impressive, especially for the first time. One of the most memorable things about Brandon was the absolutely awful food that we were given. Some time after I had left there the officers in charge of the food were court-martialed for stealing supplies and selling them to a local restaurant. Sports programs were carried out as part of our training, and we were regularly entertained by various celebrities, Marlene Dietrich visited, and entertained, giving a very impressive concert. She reputedly had the most perfect female lower limbs in show business. The parade ground at Brandon manning depot was known as the gopher patch. Apparently there was a gopher town there before the

military came; the gophers did not want to leave. As a consequence, care had to be taken to avoid stepping into a gopher burrow.

Having completed basic training, I was selected for aircrew training but the initial training schools were full at that time. As a result, we were assigned to so called general duties, and posted to Dauphin, Manitoba a service flying training school, where student pilots were doing the second phase of their flying training. Here, on the station, was a large vegetable garden to which I was assigned, my weapon being a hoe and a rake, this was obviously a make work project to keep the waiting airmen busy and out of trouble.

After two weeks, we were shipped out to the University of British Columbia to upgrade our mathematics, learn some basics of navigation and some signaling. Discipline was much easier, the weather was great, the beach was nearby and Vancouver was lively. Exploration of Stanley Park occupied many off hours, as it seemed to be populated by friendly young women with tandem bicycles.

We were at UBC for about four weeks or so when the Number 7 I.T.S. accepted a new class for the academic part of flying. This school taught the expected subjects for student pilots and navigators. Our group was designated course #84, and I was in E flight. The subjects included the principles of flight, navigation, firearms, meteorology, aero engines, aircraft recognition and lots of physical training and military drill. At the end of this experience which lasted eight week, we were selected for further training as either a pilot or a navigator, and sent to appropriate training stations.

I was selected for pilot training. It was a very enjoyable and interesting experience. I have always fondly remembered my stay at Saskatoon and #7 ITS. My next stop was at elementary flying training school at Davidson Saskatchewan, which is located about halfway between Saskatoon and Regina, in the heart of the prairie wheat fields. Being around the beginning of Sept. 1944, the wheat was about ready to be harvested. Autumn weather was bright sunlight, clear skies, and warm days. The station was equipped with Fairchild Cornell trainers, single engine monoplanes, and easy to fly. My flying instructor was a flight sergeant McLeod who was a quiet reserved person who was a patient

teacher, positive and encouraging in outlook. We continued our theoretical class room work as well as being introduced to actual flying.

There was a great urgency to the process of learning to fly, and any difficulty experienced by the student had to be overcome quickly because of the high rate of casualties in the theaters of war. I had difficulty with landing, tending to come in too high, and having to fly onto the ground rather than making the desired three point landing that was required. After a few hours of solo time, my performance was checked out by the chief instructor, who told me that I was not progressing fast enough with the landing procedure and that I would have to remuster to another air crew skill.

Being "washed out," (as it was called,) was very disappointing; but I wished to carry on flying; and requested a remuster, to air gunner training. After a few days back at Brandon Manning depot, I was posted to Bombing and Gunnery school [#3[at McDonald, Manitoba. It was now Christmas time, and I was eligible for a short furlough. As the distance to home in Ophir, Ont. was too far for the few days that I had, I decided to accept an invitation to spend the holiday with my relatives in Fort William [now a part of Thunder Bay]. My mother's sister, my Aunt Mary McNally, and her husband treated me like one of their own. Aunt Mary was very much like my mother, and when I awoke in the morning and heard her talking on the phone, I thought for a moment that I was at home.

The McNally's lived on a farm in a little place just west of Thunder Bay, called Murillo. I had four McNally cousins, Betty, Ida, and twin boys, Jim and Sam. Ida and I were the same age, but they were all fairly close in age, so that we had a great time together. I also visited my Uncle Tom Cooper, a half brother of my mother. His wife was Aunt Alma, and their children were daughters Marion, Edna and Norma. They had visited us on the farm in McPhee's Valley, on a couple of occasions previously, so that I knew them quite well. My Uncle Tom had been a railroad conductor on the CNR but was retired by that time. The relatives all got together during my visit, had a wonderful Christmas celebration, which made being away from home for the first time at Christmas much easier. Little did I imagine that my next Christmas would be in a P.O.W. camp. It

was a great chance to become better acquainted with my family in the Lakehead area, since, because of the distance; we did not meet too often.

Just after New Year I reported back to McDonald to carry on with training to be an air gunner. The emphasis was on gunnery of course, including the intricacies of the .303 Browning machine gun which we had to be able to take apart and assemble in the dark. Of course, marksmanship was stressed, with skeet shooting, rifle range, and air to air drogue shooting occupying much time. Aircraft recognition was also a major study, as no one wanted to fire on friendly craft. We also spent time on the basics of navigation, map reading, and continued to do the physical training, and the military drill.

The recreation facilities on the station were first class, with equipment to do gymnasium, basket ball, indoor soccer, and a particularly vicious game called Borden ball. Bowling alleys and a theater were available. Two types of air craft were in use at McDonald, both obsolete operational planes, one was the Lysander, the other the Ferry Battle. The Lysander was used to tow the drogues, and the Ferry Battle carried the training air gunner. The ammunition was marked so that the drogue was stained a certain color which could then be matched with a certain shooter. A seven per cent hit rate was considered acceptable.

Portage La Prairie was the nearest town with any appreciative population, being seventeen miles from the school, so that we were not distracted by the night life there. However, there was the usual beer parlor, the only drinking establishment: Actually, because of the distance we spent most of our leisure on the base, as there were more facilities there than in town. Winnipeg was some one hundred miles away, so that I had just one visit there, and my lasting impression was how cold it could be. The winter of 1943-44 was notable for the heavy snow throughout the country, and southern Manitoba was no exception. One winter storm lasted three days, during which it was not possible to go out except to go from building to building. Being a typical prairie blizzard, with high winds and low temperatures, snow was piled up against the northwest sides of the buildings. Snow drifts up to the full heights of the buildings covered walk ways. Following the storm the whole station personnel were required to work with shovels anywhere that snow ploughs could not access. The snow was hard packed and

came away in solid blocks, which would have been great for building igloos.

Gunnery training lasted eight to ten weeks, so that in March 1944, I was again posted, this time to Valleyfield, Quebec, for what was called "Commando" training. This consisted of six weeks training by the army, and I guess was supposed to toughen us up, and prepare us for the possibility of having to survive in a hostile country, in the event we were shot down and captured by the enemy, or in case our operational air field was attacked by a ground force. All of our officers and NCO's were from the army except for a few air force liaison officers. The army officers were all from previous combat experience were tough, fair and firm disciplinarians. The air force officers were non-combatants, who were caught up in protocol and the fact that they were officers. Much of the time we were in a state of incipient revolt in our dealings with these pompous persons.

During our time at Valleyfield, we learned how we could endure conditions that we couldn't imagine. Being March and April, the weather, most of the time, was typical of winter and early spring. Whatever the weather, we did our thing- obstacle courses, twenty mile route marches, rough terrain exercises including wading through rivers and canals in which the ice had been broken to accommodate us. While wading through these ice sheets, gunners fired over our heads with live ammunition. We practiced bayonet drill during which in single file, we had to impale a mannequin, disengage and quickly, get out of the way of the next man, or suffer the consequence. Many of the men who had been raised in a protected environment were sure that we were going to die of exposure, but during all of our time there, no one became ill with as much as a cold. Blisters from the long marches were the most common malady, and as we toughened, even that problem disappeared.

By the time we finished with this training we felt we were ready for anything. In spite of the rigorous activities, this was a very enjoyable experience. Certainly, I am sure that the things that we learned there greatly contributed to our survival in the bad days that were ahead. In Valleyfield we again encountered our French-Canadian fellow citizens, this time civilians. We were surprised to realize that, unlike other locations in Canada, we were not welcome in the town, except in those

places where we might spend some money. The conscription issue had been boiling for most of the war, and of course conscription was totally unacceptable in Quebec. The most hostile ones were the young male Quebecois, many of them being what was then termed "zoot suitors" identified by their clothes. The fashion consisted of suit coats which had grossly padded shoulders, trousers which were baggy with tight cuffs, accented with watch chains and fobs. During our stay there we had several altercations with this element, so that we did not go into the town except in groups of four or five or even more. Eventually the town was declared out of bounds, and soon after we were out of there.

From Valleyfield we were posted to Lachine "Y" depot to await assignment which was almost always to Europe, or to coastal command. We were posted overseas to Britain, which meant we were allowed a short embarkation leave, with enough time to spend a couple of days at home. I remember being on a "high", very enthusiastic about all the places that I had seen and all the very exciting things that I had done. I was anticipating travel overseas to see what this war was all about. My parents did not share my enthusiasm. They had live through the recent war in which my uncles had participated, one lost his life, one had had a gruesome trench warfare experience, and two others had various grim experiences. They had a better appreciation than I of the real nature of war. However, they were down to earth people who knew that, under the circumstance, there was nothing that they could do to alter the situation. For the first time in my life I remember my father embracing me, having tears in his eyes, a break in his voice, and of him being emotionally on the edge of his control. My mother who was a very warm hearted, physically affectionate woman was in tears. Suddenly, the situation was not as romantic and exciting as it had been. Now that I am a parent, I cannot help but wonder how I could handle such a farewell. From that day, I have a much different image of my parents.

Back at Lachine, I awaited an overseas draft, in the meantime had a good time in Montreal. Again, we had to go to town in groups for protection, for the same reasons that we had to in Valleyfield. The resentment against conscription was directed against the volunteer military service, no doubt augmented by the reaction of the sailors, soldiers and air men to the so-called "draft-dodgers". The aggression was met with like, resulting in some very nasty incidents. Since then I

have thought back to the French-Canadian volunteers in Manning depot in Toronto {the School of English] and how they were insulted by the Anglophone NCO's. One time when a couple of the French-Canadians were having a private conversation in French an NCO shouted at them," Stop speaking that frog talk, and speak a white man's language". There were two sides to the nasty situations, and the Quebec men certainly had their dignity challenged, and unnecessarily.

In April or early May, 1944, an overseas draft included my name, with a special assignment attached. The troop ship "the Empress of Ireland", required gunners to man the anti aircraft guns for the trip across the Atlantic. Also required were spotters to watch for submarines and enemy air craft. As a result, several of us from the "Air Gunner" classification, were seconded to the ship company to fulfill those roles. We were sent as an advance party to Halifax to take on these duties and to receive some orientation and training in our duties. I was assigned to the bow of the ship to man a turret of oerlikon guns. The trip through the eastern part of Canada was a first to me, and I was certainly impressed with the beauty of the countryside. The rolling stock of the railroad was not luxurious, consisting of ``colonial cars", which were mostly of wooden construction, the seats being much like park benches, and like park benches had no padding. As I remember, the food was not great, being on the edge of edible, causing much grumbling. We had a choice, eat it or leave it and the military theory was that a complaining troop was not dangerous.

Shortly after arriving in Halifax, we were marched to the dock area and boarded an almost empty ship. Our sleeping quarters were well below the water line in a cabin with sixteen hammocks, with barely room to move between them. Fortunately, for the gun crews, we were able to spend many hours on duty on the deck at our stations. The gun battery that I manned was on the extreme bow of the ship, although at that position we were really bounced around in the early spring seas of the north Atlantic. Often we were apparently well below the level of the sea, alternating with an ascent several stories above; as the ship went through the crest and trough of the waves. There was only one really tense moment when a twin engine air craft was spotted near Ireland; this was quickly identified as a Boston light bomber from coastal

command. We failed to encounter any submarines which did not make us a bit unhappy!

The food on ship, served to the "other ranks", (which included us) was verging on the inedible. Our utensils consisted of a knife, fork and spoon, and two mess tins, with hinged wire handles. The tins measured about six inches by five inches by two and one-half inches. The food was placed in one of these containers and the beverages in the other. The only alternative to having all the items thrown together was to skip anything that you didn't want mixed in. Having canned plums thrown in with beef hash was not that appealing, especially when the hash had runny gravy. Most of the time it was not too difficult to pass on the whole disgusting mess, along with the upset stomach, especially when the sea was rolling,. Trying to sleep in the crowded confined quarters was a chore, as one swung back and forth [or end to end] in a hammock which frequently bumped your neighbor. Many of the men were immobilized by motion sickness, and for three days there was lots of motion as we sailed through a spring north Atlantic storm. Actually the trip was uneventful, lasting about five or six days. Early one morning we could see Ireland ahead. We skirted around it for several hours, docking at Bristol, England.

From Bristol we were transported to Brighton by military buses. As it was spring, May 1944, the countryside was at its best with everything garden green, and blooms in prime. With the groomed hedge rows and cultivated crops so neat, the whole scene was so peaceful; it was hard to imagine that there was a deadly war going on. Brighton, our destination is a holiday resort city on the south coast of England, with beautiful hotels, impressive homes, and lush gardens. Our billets were in one of the luxurious hotels, giving us the best accommodation that we would enjoy for a long time. Just down from our quarters was the English Channel, with wide beaches which were barricaded with concrete tank barriers and rolls of barbed wire. Not long after our arrival we experienced our first air raid, but there was no action near. A few days before we arrived, a nearby park had been strafed by a German fighter plane, killing some people who were caught in the open. We were warned to take the air raid siren seriously.

By June 10 (approximately) we were on the move again, arriving at Wellesbourne, Montford, number 22, Operational Training Unit [OTU] , near Stratford-on-Avon, and about mid way between Gloucester and Cheltenham. Orientation to the Wellington Bomber training planes, intensive classes in the geography of flying space, in and around Britain occupied about ten days.

My first contact was with the NCO personnel as we were housed together in the sergeant's mess and living quarters. Louis Bassarab was a farmer's son from Peace River, Alberta, a very friendly bright young man. As we were both air gunners, we decided that we would fly together. We were fast friends before we met the rest of the crew as we were in separate classes in the orientation process. In the mess we had met Ken Wilson, wireless operator. Ken was a Warrant Officer, class II, and was from Eastern Ontario. When it came time to fly, we met the three commissioned officers that completed the crew except the flight engineer who joined us at the next step [Heavy Conversion Unit] Flight Lieutenant Albert Steeves was a pilot who had spent a year in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada as an instructor at Service Flying Training School. Flying officer Al. Rowley from Alberta was a navigator. Pilot Officer Lloyd Frizzell from New Brunswick was our Bomb Aimer.

From June 29, 1944, we trained intensively, flying nearly every day, and taking ground classes in between. Subjects such as map reading navigation, taking fixes, on landmarks, mechanics and maintenance of Browning machine guns, marksmanship in air with the principles of deflection shooting, Fighter affiliation with cine cameras, and on the ground, skeet shooting, rifle range, handling hand guns. As a crew, we practiced evasive action, with simulated attack by a fighter plane, high level bombing, night flying, many cross country flights, day and night. On August 16, 1944, we were sent on a mission called "Diversion Bulls Eye". Our mission was to fly to the Dutch coast, hopefully to simulate the approach of a bombing attack on Germany. This was orchestrated to induce the German fighter interceptors, to take off from their bases, chase us, and deplete their supply of fuel. We were to reverse course and head back to England before the fighters had a chance to catch us. The calculations were a little off that day, the German fighters did get through, and we ended up with a hole in the skin of our aircraft.

Fortunately we escaped with no one injured, and I believe no other aircraft was damaged. On Aug. 18, we did a similar exercise, with no excitement whatever.

Our course finished at Wellesbourne, we moved again this time to Yorkshire, to learn the intricacies of the four engine Halifax bomber.This station was a Heavy Conversion Unit located at Wombledon, Yorkshire, and was our home for the nest couple of months. It was here that we were joined by Sgt. Edgar "Nobby" Clarke, from the RAF, who completed our crew. For some reason the flight engineers were all from the RAF. Clarke was a great fellow who was easy going and easy to get along with everyone.

Between our stint at Wellesbourne and Wombledon, we were given a few days off, which allowed us to go to London to explore that great city, which we did for many hours a day on foot and by the Underground. Time has dimmed the memories, but I remember a very nice hostel, with friendly young women staff who asked us if we would like to be "knocked up", in the morning and what time. Of course, the words "knocked up" had a much different meaning to them than it did for us. Fascinated by places like Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, Nelson's monument, Parliament, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, London Bridge, Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, I walked for miles. In between, we sampled the pubs and night life. Piccadilly Square was the territory of the ladies of the night; the black-out did not seem to inhibit their activities. This was a new experience for me, but fortunately my home training, and the venereal disease lectures from the medical officers, prevented any thoughts that I might have about purchasing their services.

While I was in London, the "buzz" bombs were coming over from Europe. These devices were actually unmanned air craft containing a bomb which had an automatic pilot, and were sent over London, the motor was programmed to cut out, and the device came down wherever, exploding on contact with the ground. One of these devices came down about a block away from our hostel, killing four hundred people. One pub in London impressed me. This was called "Dirty Dick's", lived up to its name, with all kinds of clutter around, and cobwebs hanging from the ceiling timbers. London was crowded with service

men from every corner of the Empire and the United States, as well as units of military personnel from countries in occupied Europe. So many years have passed that it is hard to remember the sequence of events, but I must record a couple of other interesting leave experiences that I had, usually between training blocks.

Between OTU and HCU, Louis and I took advantage of a program that was set up to help the overseas troops keep their spirits up. There was a registry of homes that would welcome service men into their homes for a leave, give them lodging, meals and show them some of the places of interest. We registered with a family near Birmingham. The Copes were owners of a motor cycle factory and at that time, of course, were making military equipment. They had a country estate well away from what was called the "Black Country" area. The terrain in this "Black Country" was very much like that around Sudbury, with piles of slag, and stunted or no vegetation. The Copes were extremely hospitable and generous. They were most appreciative of the food coupons we brought from camp to cover our food while on leave. Elegant affluence would be a good description of the Cope's circumstances. They had a stable of racing and riding horses, but were having difficulty feeding them, as the government required them to devote a large part of their land to growing potatoes and other food for humans. They were particularly concerned about their hunting horses, and were afraid that they would have to get rid of their beloved animals. The English countryside wildlife werebountiful on this estate; walking along the hedge rows one would scare up things like hare, fox, and there was a great variety of bird life. One evening while sitting in a oom with a picture window looking out on a large lawn, Mr. Cope spotted a hare, jumped up, took a firearm and dispatched the animal. The next day we had the meat for dinner and it was delicious.

Mr. Cope and his son were officers in the Home Guard, which was like a militia, essentially a civilian army, which patrolled bridges and other vulnerable infrastructure. The senior Cope was colonel of the local group, and the son was a first lieutenant. Fortunately, their work in the Home Guard was not too secret so that they were able to take us on their rounds. This gave us a chance to see much of the area, and the interesting spots, nooks and crannies. We were treated as honoured

guests, made to feel that we were doing the English a favour by being there.

Back to Wombleton; we had to get used again to the Nissen hut, heated only with wood or coal that we could find or steal from hedge rows or piles of unguarded coal. Although we were warned that we would be charged and punished if we were caught stealing coal, I don't remember anyone receiving any serious penalty. Nissen huts were virtually large corrugated metal tubes like those seen in culverts under roads. There was a row of cots down each side of the hut with a walk way down the center. About halfway down the hut there was a coal-wood stove, to take the chill and dampness out of the area, but heat the hut it did not. As the food in the Sergeant's mess was not that good or plentiful except for the bread, we frequently loaded up with bread and jam which we concealed in our battle tunic, and brought back to the hut. Toasting the bread at the stove, covering it with jam, and enjoying at leisure, relieved some of the hunger, and I am sure supplied emotional comfort. Frequently we would obtain evening passes and ead for town for whatever young military personnel could find to do. This usually involved a pub. Fish and chip served in cones of newspaper was very inexpensive and delicious. Occasionally we would find some local activity such as a country dance that would entertain, and relieve some of the routine in our lives. There seemed to be many young women around like those in the military or the land army [female farm workers], and they also were looking for some fun and companionship. Many of these young women became war brides.

At Wombledon we were introduced to the four engine bomber, the Halifax. Again we had a few days of class work before flying. Our first flight in a Halifax was on October 2, 1944; and by October 30, 1944, we were deemed ready to go to an operational squadron. Rain, fog and damp chilly weather form my memories of Wombledon. We arrived in a heavy rain storm which was still in progress when we left six weeks later. The air field was in a valley with a rise of land to the west on which was an apple orchard. The prevailing wind was from the west, so that, very frequently, we had to take off toward the west. The air craft, in which we had to train, had been decommissioned from combat operations, and not suitable for combat. As well as being old they were very poorly maintained, and really a hazard to fly. Many times it was a

heart stopping adventure to take off over that apple orchard wondering whether there was enough horse power in the old engines to get us clear of the tree tops. Not infrequently someone ended up in the apple trees.

One night we were on a cross country navigation exercise which took us south over Wales, then north up the Irish Sea, across the north of Scotland and back to base at Wombledon. However, over Wales, we ran into thunderstorms. The lightning was playing across various parts of the air craft, especially across the gun muzzles. Suddenly we flew into a down draft, which dropped us downward at a great rate. At the same time the intercommunication system ceased to function. For a short time [which seemed like a long time] I concluded that we were going to crash, but the pilot gained control of the craft, and the intercom clicked in. The navigator was informing the pilot that we were flying below the highest of the mountains in the area. Our only option was to climb back up into the clouds and say some prayers. Finally escaping the storm, the wireless operator received a message ordering us back to base because of bad weather over Wales. This was probably the most frightening experience that I had except getting shot down a few weeks later. As usual, around Wombledon, the only off base diversions were the small towns and the pubs.

Part of our training was escape from hazardous situation exercises, such as dingy drill, and parachute training, especially how to land without breaking a leg. Our "dinghy drill" was done in a swimming pool in Rippon, a small town near by. I had never learned to swim, a fact that the instructors did not deem too important. We were lined up along the deep end of the pool wearing our "Mae West" inflatable, had to jump in, inflate the device, and congregate around a rubber craft; all the time wearing blind folds. Quickly I learned to swim using the breast stroke method. For parachute drill we jumped from a platform which was about ten feet off the ground. We were shown how to land and roll so that we did not absorb all the force of the fall through our lower extremities.

While at Wombledon, we did have some day passes, one which I remember particularly, was spent on a trip to the beach at Scarborough, on the North Sea. This was a recreational resort, frequented by people

with a day off, or on vacation. Particularly I remember the ice cream booths, the puppet shows, and the general carnival atmosphere. I was impressed with the very nice sand, which was black. Back from the beach cliffs rose up to a height which, as I remember, was a hundred or more feet.

Between our time at HCU at Wombledon, and our reporting to the squadron, we had a few days leave, which Louis and I used to visit Edinburgh. After what to us was a short train trip through the beautiful scenery of middle Britain; we arrived in Edinburgh, found a hostel not far from Princess Street, and went exploring. Of course, we found the city fascinating, especially along Princess Street, the park and gardens below the castle, and the Royal Mile. We noted on the bulletin board a party advertised that evening, scouted out the location, and made sure that we were there early.

At this dance party we met a couple of young unattached women, who tried to teach us some of the Scottish dances. I guess that we were successful to some degree, as they invited us home, and my new friend gave me a bed for the night. Not her bed! In the morning I met her parents and a sister, was given a wonderful full Scottish breakfast, and received a lecture from her mother on the evils of alcohol. After breakfast, she suggested that we go out to a beach somewhere nearby, and after a considerable bus ride we arrived at a small beach. The water was frigid and the wind quite brisk, which completely discouraged me from any thought of swimming. However my friend, in spite of the weather and the time of year, ran into the water which turned her glowing pink. I was turning blue just sitting watching her. This was late October. I did have a correspondence with her for some time but the turn of events was such that we lost touch. Life in those days was so tentative, and almost transitory. The food ration coupons were again greatly appreciated by the mother, a reflection of how stringent and skimpy the allowances were.

We reported to the squadron [408- The Goose Squadron] about November 1, 1944. The lodgings were in a large country home, called Beningborough Hall, at Linton-on-Ouse, the home of Lady Chesterfield. The NCOs were billeted in what was the ballroom of this building. There were various rooms through this building, separated by massive

supporting columns, but adequately heated and comfortably furnished. Many of these big estates were given to the government for various uses, as part of a total war effort, and I assume were returned to the owner after the war. Our living conditions were spartan, but luxurious as compared to a nissen hut.

Almost immediately we began our orientation to the operational Halifax bomber, and immediately were impressed with this superbly fitted and maintained machine. The engines were Hercules radial air cooled, very powerful 1650 hp. in which we felt confident, especially in comparison with the ramshackle machines that we had on HCU. After having lost several of our friends at HCU in training accidents, it was great to have equipment that had the appearance and feel of good performance. We did a bit of flying in our assigned craft, our pilot did a couple of trips as "second dickie", and we were as ready as we were going to be for what were called "operations". [The Americans called their combat trips "missions"].

Our first "Op" was a daylight trip to Munster, Germany. The day was overcast when we arrived at the target so that we had to drop our bombs on sky markers, which were flares hanging on parachutes, placed by the pathfinders. These senior flyers were experienced men who had done several tours of operations, and were assigned the job of marking the target before the main bomber stream arrived. They would mark the target with ground flares usually, but when the cloud covered the ground, they would use sky markers, flairs on 'chutes. All around us there were puffs of smoke which appeared innocuous, but as they crept closer, one could see an ominous red center in the puff of smoke. As the line of smoke came closer, we would have to take evasive action to avoid being hit. In enemy territory, the Bomb aimer dropped tinsel from the plane to confound the enemy radar, which was controlling the guns firing the flak which appeared to us as puffs of smoke. During this trip to Munster we did have a slight hit from the flak, causing a scratch on the fabric but no damage to the vital machinery or to the personnel. The trip took six hours.

Before each operation we had a "briefing" which was in two parts: the first part involved the crew except the gunners, and the second part the whole crew. While the rest of the crew was in the first session, the

gunners had their own briefing with the chief gunnery officer. At the briefing the target would be revealed, along with the expected weather conditions, and an outline of any anticipated difficulties, such as heavy defenses of flak, and fighter squadrons. On arrival back at base, there would be a debriefing, at which the crews would report on the target, flak, night fighters, and any enemy encounters, and craft shot down, [friend or enemy], and any difficulties with our aircraft, or our equipment. Following our debriefing, we were given a meal of bacon, eggs, and sometimes steak.

On November 19, we were warned that "Ops" were planned for that night. We noticed that our air craft were fitted with overload fuel tanks, which indicated a very long flight. The rumor had it that we were going to bomb Berlin. The crew except the gunners was called into a briefing, but before the gunners` briefing the word to stand down came over the Tannoy [loud speaker]. Every one cheered in relief which shows that we weren't that anxious to die that day. There was a rather macabre custom on our squadron that required each are crew to throw some money into a pot. If everyone came back safely, the pot grew, but if there were any no returns, the pot financed a beer party, where the money bought as much beer as possible, and drinking continued until consumed. During this time we sang ribald songs including; the one entitled "here's to the next one to die"]. Since then I have often ondered about the psychological significance of this strange behavior; and I am sure that it was a coping mechanism. Certainly, we were all aware that our chances of surviving a tour of operations, or even surviving the first ten operations, were not that great.

On Nov 21, 1944, the squadron was alerted that "ops' were on, the usual briefing carried out, where we found that our trip was to be to the Ruhr Valley, city of Castrop-Rauxel near Dortmund-on-Ems. We were to bomb a synthetic oil plant as our primary target. The forecast was for clear skies, no moon. We were to climb to twenty two thousand feet, drop our bombs, then head towards Dusseldorf, losing altitude to fifteen thousand feet which we would maintain on our flight back to base. This was a large raid, the exact number I do not remember. I do remember that the sky was full of Lancasters and Halifaxes, as far as the eye could see, and at varies heights. Of course the thought crossed ones mind about the possibilities of mid are collisions, which on occasion did occur,

but surprisingly infrequently... Some times air craft would be struck by bombs dropped from an air craft above. As we gained altitude that night, the rear turret became colder and eventually the electrical element was turned on. It soon became evident that it was not working properly as it became so hot that I was afraid of a burn, so that I had to turn it off. Such a minor dysfunction was not reason to return to base, even though I knew that the temperature in the turret would fall well below zero degrees F., four miles above sea level.

As we crossed over into Germany, we began to experience some flak, but none was close, and our flight was uneventful until we approached the target. The scene below was unbelievable, with bright marker flares of different colors and intensity. The dialogue on the intercom between the pilot and the bomb aimer brought the air craft onto the bombing run. At that time, from my position in the rear turret, I could see converging search lights, and knew that we would soon be "coned. That is we would be the focus of several lights at the same time. Of course, this was reported to the pilot, who was the captain of the air craft. I requested that he take evasive action, His comment was that we needed to stay on constant course in order to bomb accurately, so that no evasive action was taken and we did get coned. When coned one is surrounded by the most intense light that can be imagined, Night vision is lost, and we were sitting ducks. In what seemed an eternity, but probably only a few seconds, the bomb aimer announced "bombs away", and at the same time we experienced the usual upward lurch of the craft. Suddenly the search lights were turned off, as we turned towards our route for home.

Suddenly the search lights were turned off, as we turned towards our route for home. Through half blinded eyes, I continued to do a sky search, spotted a Junkers 88 German fighter craft on the port side and behind at forty five degree angle. Aware that he may be a decoy, I directed the mid upper gunner to keep an eye on him. I then noted a second Junkers 88 to the port and below coming at us, and about the same time, tracer bullet-were flying by my ears. I could see the tail plane of our craft disintegrate. My equipment by this time was inoperative. The wireless operator reported that the mid upper gunner was wounded and bleeding badly. Almost at once, I was aware of a heavy blow to the right side of my head, following which I am unaware of what

happened. I must have opened the turret doors and tumbled out, or more likely, was blown out by an explosion of the fuel tanks. My next awareness was of something hitting my face, realized that it was my flying suit legs, that had come out of my boots, that I was free falling, and in a daze, pulled my rip cord. Thanks to some young woman back in stores, my parachute opened, with the characteristic thump, like a kick in the butt, and very shortly I violently landed on a slate roof, slid down onto a cobble stone court yard onto my back. Needless to say I was winded, confused, disoriented at least momentarily.

As I lay on my back trying to get my breath, I realized that it was raining, a cold steady patter. Quickly I began to realize my precarious situation, and my mind went through the protocol after bail out in enemy territory. After a frantic and unsuccessful attempt to free my parachute from the roof of the house, I abandoned it, and ran through a small village into nearby woods. I found myself in a ravine, the banks of which were steep, with a thick vine-like growth extending down. A space between the vine and the bank nicely accommodated my body, and I climbed under to wait for morning and to contemplate my next moves. Fully attired in my flying gear, and not yet too wet from rain, I lay still listening to the air craft overhead, realizing that the people in the nearby village were in the are raid shelters, and that they would not be too happy with an airman who recently had been dropping bombs on them. Explosions and gunfire could be heard in the distance. The whole thing is vague in my mind, and I am sure that I was suffering from a mild concussion as a result of the explosion in the air, and the bangs on the head, while landing in my parachute. My memories of that night are a ghostly series of frantic plans, drowsing off to sleep for periods, and awakening with a start. The steady rain trickling through the vine produced increasing discomfort.

As the morning light allowed me to survey my situation, I found that I had no severe injuries. My right foot felt wet and cold which I found out to be due to a boot full of blood. There was blood on the side of my face, and a very sore spot on my right temple. The cut on my right temple was due to a fragment of metal that had hit me at the time the plane was shot down and while I dangled in my parachute, and had raced into the woods from where I had landed, the wound had bled enough to track down into my flying boot. A few months after I was back in Canada, I

had a piece of metal lodge in my cheek while splitting wood with a wedge and a sledge. This formed an abscess; I went to the hospital emergency where an x-ray showed two pieces of metal, one in the abscess and one in the muscles of my right temple.

As I lay in my hiding place, I could hear people walking by, the usual noises of a village, such as dogs barking, motor vehicles, and children playing. My so called "escape kit", a small pocket size plastic like [or maybe metal] contained some horlicks tablets, candies, a silk map of Europe, and a collar button compass. My plan was to wait until dark, then head for Arnhem, in Holland where the battle front was located at that time. The compass gave me an idea of a northerly direction, and I needed to go north-west. When the sounds of the village settled, I climbed out of my hiding place to begin my journey. I found myself to be on the edge of a village, beyond which was some open country and farm land. I soon noticed that there was sound of military activity, the sound of heavy guns, to what I judged to be north-west. As much as possible I avoided built up areas, and main roads. At one point I found myself beside a road, along which people were moving, so that I crouched in a ditch to avoid detection. When it became too light to avoid being seen, I found a wooded area where I could stay out of sight.

The second night on the ground, I found another sheltered wood where I could hide, and nearby there was a field where I found some discarded cabbages and was able to eat some of the good parts. This was definitely not very filling and by this time I was getting a little hungry. All the time the cold rain was falling and it was getting colder, eventually starting to snow. Of course I was thoroughly wet, but it was still not conceivable that I was going to be captured, so that I slogged on through the dark. I calculated that it was now November 23. As darkness came, I again ran into a heavy wet snowstorm. At one time, early in the evening, I stumbled into a town, found myself close to a troop of juveniles in uniform, marching along singing a song --- Hitler youth! I had a feeling that they had seen me, but it was quite dark, and as quickly and quietly as I could, I put distance between me and them. Running down a hill to distance myself from this menace, I tripped, landing on my face, lacerating the point of my chin, and knocking myself out.

Again, by morning light, I had found a bushy hiding place, but realized that I was beginning to suffer from hunger and exposure. One night while crossing a field, I came across the parts of a Halifax bomber- most of one wing and some debris. I wondered if it was part of the air craft that we took to Germany. While going through the fields and woods, I noted every tree and bush was festooned with metal foil strips, the material called 'window", which was used to confuse the German radar. Some trees resembled those decorated for Christmas. After another very uncomfortable day in hiding, probably about the last few days of November, I continued my trek towards the sounds of artillery in the north-west. Above me, I could hear the heavy drone of air craft, my pals from Bomber command, making their almost nightly visits to the industrial heart land of Germany. All night I plodded on, avoiding any built up areas as much as possible, and again trying to find a hiding place in which to spend the day.

On an early morning, I came to a farm on the side of a large river, which I assumed to be the Rhine, and no way across. Having been outside, clothes wet, below freezing weather, I could not resist taking shelter in the barn, where I burrowed into the dry fodder and slept soundly. I had intended leaving the barn before daylight, but as I was about to climb out of the hay mow, a very large dog raised an alarm, and I was in no condition to challenge him. A middle aged man, presumably the farmer, came into the barn, spotted me and seemed to be quite alarmed at my presence. As I knew that further thoughts of escape were futile, I indicated to him that I was unarmed, and did not intend to challenge him. No doubt, I was a sorry sight, dressed in flying gear, bloody from my wounds and surviving for a week outdoor in winter.

The farmer did not exhibit any aggression toward me, indicated that I should follow him into the nearby dwelling, and alerted his family, a wife and two `teen-aged girls. One of the girls offered me a chair and proceeded to remove my boots, my wet outer clothing, or at least gave me help as my hands were stiff from cold and exposure. She spread the clothing over some chairs in front of a coal fire. The family was sitting down to breakfast of bread eggs, meat and coffee, which they shared with me. Being young and without any proper food for a week, the offering was most gratefully received. My belief that all Germans were bad people was badly shaken that day. I also did not know that, that

very morning in nearby Dusseldorf, a couple of downed air men were hanged on a lamp post by a mob of angry Germans. Obviously the farm people that picked me up were devout Catholic Christians as they had their crucifix on the wall and held their morning religious prayers before eating their breakfast. I found this to be most unsettling as I was prepared for a hostile, if not a violent reception.

However, as I expected, in less than an hour, a German soldier arrived who they addressed as "feltwebl" He was riding a bicycle. After he had talked to the family for a short time, undoubtedly about the details of their encounter with me, he brought out a cord, like an electrical cord, tied one end to my wrist, and the other end to his wrist we took off with him slowly riding the bicycle and me walking as fast as I could along side. We proceeded along a dirt road for a short distance to a junction of a paved road, and made our way into a built up area. We passed a sign which indicated that we were entering Dusseldorf and I realized that I was a long way from Arnhem. It was a long walk from the farm house to the offices that were our destination, through streets and past buildings which had been bombed out. In many places the street was reduced to one lane from rubble of bombing raids. As it was still early in the morning, we met very few people on foot.

Finally we arrived at a building like a police station, where more papers were filled out, and I was placed in a corner of an open office. A young woman clerk was working there, a bright young person who hummed and sang to the music of Straus, which was playing on a radio. When she moved around, it was in a waltz-like motion. Many times I have wondered what happened to her, and what the rest of her life was like. As yet no one tried to interview me.

About noon, a Luftwaffe NCO arrived, spoke English to me and informed me that we were going to Oberousle near Frankfort-on-Maine. A military car took us to the railway station, where there were lots of people. I was recognized as a British flyer, and was the recipient of anger and obvious insults, even though I did not understand what exactly they were saying. The Luftwaffe person came on the train with me. It was a passenger train with mostly civilians, but some uniformed people. The train was crowded, but I was given a seat next a window with the guard sitting beside me. This was not express service; the train

was slow in getting started and crept out of the city. About two hours toward Frankfort, suddenly there was the sound of fast approaching air craft, the chatter of gun fire followed by a bang. The train came to an abrupt halt, and people were diving off the train and crouching in the ditched. In the panic I was separated from the guard as he had jumped off one side of the train and I jumped off the other. Obviously, the attacking air craft which I was able to get a good look at, had struck the engine and had blown the boiler. The attacker plane, an American Thunderbolt, was well known as a tactical specialist in knocking off rail and road traffic All of this happened very quickly, and was over in a flash. As people recovered from the shock of events they again took notice of me, and started shouting, and threatening me. Fortunately my guard appeared, shouted orders at my tormentors, who backed off.

After a wait of an hour or so, another locomotive was brought in and we continued on our way to Oberousl. As we were getting off the train, a group of ten to fifteen women began crowding us, shouting and spitting, becoming more and more agitated and angry. My guard drew his hand gun, positioned himself between me and the menacing mob. Gradually he backed me into a comer of the brick station platform, shouting orders; and obviously threatening to shoot if necessary. Gradually the mob quieted down, backed off and dispersed. This is one of the few times that I conceded to myself that I might not survive the war. I tried to express my gratitude to the guard; but he totally ignored me. No doubt he would have been in some difficulty if I had been killed before I had been interrogated, and he probably did not have many warm feelings toward me either.

A military mini sort of bus picked us up and we soon arrived at the notorious interrogation center. I was marched to a prison cell, approximately eight feet by four or five feet and eight feet, with a single window at the ceiling, but covered by an outside shutter, and inside bars. Furniture was a single bunk of boards and a grey blanket. On the wall was a series of marks, vertical strokes like the number 1, in groups of four, and a horizontal stroke through them. The message that I got from these obvious tally marks was that someone was recording the passage of time, likely days. One series indicated thirty, one sixty, and one fifty. The message was that some occupants had been confined to this cell for that many days. At first one dismissed this as part of a

psychological attack, but as the days passed the ruse did have an effect. By this time I had dried out somewhat, but was still in the clothing that I was wearing when I was shot down, a week or more before. By now it was late evening, and it did not appear that I was going to see any more activity until the next morning.

After a restless night on my very hard bunk, in the very cold cell, I was greeted with a raucous voice shouting "Raus, raus', a small flap was opened in the door and some vile coffee colored fluid was presented, and I had my first taste of ersatz coffee. A little later the door opened, and I was summoned to follow a guard to an office, where I was greeted by a friendly Luftwaffe officer, invited to sit down and have a talk. We had been ordered to give only our name, rank, and regimental number, as laid down by the Geneva Convention governing the treatment of prisoners of war. The German officer assured me that I was a special case and that the Geneva Convention might not apply to me as I could not be linked with any air craft that had been shot down, and that I was really considered to be a spy. If I would cooperate with him, he might be able to persuade the authorities not to turn me over to the Gestapo. He laughingly stated the obvious, that I had been in the country for a few days. The guard was called and I was escorted back to my cell. The outside shutter had been closed, which rendered the place completely black dark. Through the day the temperature fluctuated from very warm to very cold. From time to time, I could hear scurrying in the hall and distant voices, German of course, sometimes rising to the volume of shouting.

In the afternoon, I was escorted to another office, where two officers, in black, very stern, demanded to know where I had come from, and what was my purpose. They stated that if I was not properly identified, I would probably be shot as a spy. A Luger hand gun lay on the desk beside them. "Tell us about Village Inn" they demanded, and of course I did not know anything that would have been of any use to them, but I did not know that, nor did they. Realistically, they must have been looking at a very boyish, frightened youth, who would be unlikely to have any great military secrets. However, they were very persistent and aggressive, stated that their patience was very short, and they would give me very limited time to answer their questions. Again I was escorted to my cell, where later I was presented with my first piece of

black bread and bowl of cabbage soup. Being very hungry, I did eat, although I could not imagine how any one could survive very long on such food. As time passed it was hard to keep track of day and night, or the passage of time, as mostly I was in darkness. However, by counting the number of times meager rations appeared I was there for at least a week.

Interrogation continued, with alternating shows of friendliness and then threatening confrontation. Rather persistently they continued to enquire about "Village Inn"c which was totally unknown to me. After the war I found that it was a code name some radar system of navigation. After a couple of days, I found myself to be covered with red itchy spots worst on my legs and around my waist, and which I was soon to find that the cell was infested with fleas. The "time tallys" that I had noticed on the walls began to take on a very somber significance However, after about ten days, I was suddenly removed from the cell, taken to a shower room, and after cleaning up, my clothing, which I had been wearing for the past two weeks or a little more, was discarded. I was given a parcel of clothing from the American Red Cross, which contained a couple of sets of summer underwear, a shirt, and a pair of trousers.

From there I was taken to a big room, in which there was a group of other prisoners, mostly American air men of various ranks. After the usual prisoner counts, accompanied by the usual German military shouting, we were taken to the railway station, boarded passenger cars and, were off to a place called Wetzel. We were a motley crew of RAF, USAAF, RCAF, and all looking like we had been through a cement mixer. At Wetzel was what was termed a segregation center, where we were sorted out as to nationality, rank, etc., for trips to the permanent prisoner of war camps. Here we were issued with a razor, tooth brush, comb, and other grooming aids, again thanks to the Red Cross. At Wetzel, I came across the pilot of our aircraft, Ab. Steeves, who was quite surprised to see me alive. He had been badly wounded, with wounds through the right side of his chest, where he was unprotected by the armor in the back of his seat. He had bailed out, landed in a convent grounds where there was a hospital. The nuns and the doctor there had apparently taken very good care of him, and although he had a ghastly appearance, he was alive and walking. Apparently some of the crew had gotten out of the craft, but only he and the wireless operator

reached the ground alive, and the wireless operator had died a very short time after. He was surprised to see me alive as he stated that just after he had left the plane, there was a terrific explosion and he could see a large fire ball above him. He deduced that the craft had blown the fuel tanks, and I assume that the explosion had possibly removed me from the wounded craft. There was now no doubt that he and I were the only survivors. To think that only a couple of weeks previously our fellow crew members were live vital humans and now were gone forever.

By now it was about December 11 or 12. 1944. The following day we were subjected to a superficial body examination, and were invited to make known any health problems, especially any venereal disease. There was a young American officer who had a typical syphilitic chancre on his penis, and was taken away presumably for treatment. In those days treatment consisted of injections of salvarsan, and hyperthermia in a fever box. What the regimen in Germany in 1944 was, l am not sure. After clearing the process in the segregation center, the British NCO air crew were assigned to Stalag Lufte # 7, at a place called Bankou in southern Poland, about ninety miles west of Krakow. As British aircrew NCO's we were considered to be high risk prisoners for escape attempts, and especially if we had a history of evasion or escape. The now familiar march to the railway station brought us to a box car with straw on the floor. The choice for comfort was stand, sit, or lie down and curl up in the straw. There was a small screened opening at the end of the car, for ventilation I presume. This was to be our home for about five days, with the happy thought that the American Thunderbolts were doing aerial sweeps over Germany to find and destroy the transportation system. Although, at various places along the way there were air raid warnings and the distant sounds of bombs, and the drone of the air craft, we were not allowed off the box car, the doors being closed and barred. Irregularly and infrequently, we were given a vile cheese, like small rolls of brie, there the similarity to brie ended. It had a waxy consistency and the vilest bland taste that you could imagine. We ate it!

On our trip east, we passed through Kassel, a massive railway marshaling yard. While sitting there, shortly after arriving, the air raid siren sounded, we were locked in the box car and the guards disappeared. The drone of the overhead air craft filled the air with

heavy vibration, and soon the familiar thump of exploding bombs rocked the whole existence for about thirty minutes. When the noise ceased, we could hardly believe that we were unscathed. Presently our guards appeared, very agitated and angry. Obviously, there was extensive damage to the tracks and mechanisms of the marshaling yard, preventing our immediate departure. A walk through the town, to beyond the damaged track was necessary, although we were apprehensive about going through the angry population. The damage was severe, with large craters through the railway yards, and through the town. Buildings near the station were severely damaged or collapsed. A team of dead horses were sprawled in the street, with harness still on, and their wagon on its side nearby. I do not recall any encounter with the people on this march through their town. After a walk of some distance, we again came to a small station where our box car was waiting; we boarded and were on our way.

On our continuing trip, it was noted that the countryside became almost like the Canadian prairie, and, by the time we arrived at Bankou the landscape was totally flat, as far as he eye could see. As we marched through the gate of Stalag 7B, we were met by a crowd of young men in a variety of dress, in a variety of condition. One of the first prisoners that I saw was a young blond chap, who I recognized as Eddie Clinton, who was born and raised just north of Thessalon, near where I was raised. He had been shot down a few weeks before, but until then I didn't know whether he was dead or alive. In camp we became very good friends, and had some very good times when we came back to Canada, then went our separate ways and eventually lost touch. Along with the other arrivals, I was assigned a bunk in a wooden barrack-like hut. As I remember, the hut was about one hundred, by forty feet, with one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy five men assigned bunks there in. The bunks were massive structures, made of wood, consisting of three tiers, and each three tier unit occupying about ten square feet of floor space. We were given a palliasse to fill with wood shavings, to use as a mattress. The best bed was the top bunk as we found out later. I got the bottom bunk, but at least did not have to climb to get to bed at night. In our "living space" was a rough wooden table and benches, to serve the occupants of several bunks. This looked very crude but it was the best we had seen for some weeks and was luxury to what we would experience in the near future.

Stalag #7B was by design quite isolated, surrounded by very flat land on which soft coal was extracted by strip mining. The small village of Bankou could be seen a ways from the prison, and, did not seem to be a target of the bombing campaign. Occasionally, we cold hear the bombing stream flying high overhead, presumably heading southeast maybe to the oil fields at Ploesti, in Romania, but very seldom did we hear bombs exploding. However, when the air raid siren sounded, we were required to stay inside the huts until the all clear. We were warned that anyone seen outside during an air raid alert would be shot without further warning.

Within the camp we were given a good deal of freedom to wander around, utilize the facilities, such as soccer, softball, etc. A building that was clear and big enough for use as a small theater, was used to present plays and other theater arts, I had arrived just before Christmas, and in time to enjoy the very good presentations. Amazingly good productions were put together, with props and costumes made by the prisoners, and the actors performed both male and female characters. In keeping with the Christmas season, there were concerts, with choral singing and the whole gamut of Christmas Theatre. Meals were prepared in a cookhouse, and were doled out once a day. The assigned prisoners prepared soup, boiled potatoes, and sometimes meat which I think was mostly horse, mule or donkey. Ersatz coffee accompanied the above. The soup was made with cabbage, nettles or shredded vegetables, very thin and revolting to the taste buds. For disgusting, the nettles took the prize although I have learned later was probably the most nourishing. A loaf of black bread was given out once a day, to a group of six to ten men depending on the availability, and, I suspect on the mood of the camp officers. The division of the bread was up to the prisoners to divide as they agreed. The bread was divided as equally as possible; and the portions were lined up on the table. From a deck of playing cards was dealt a card to each piece of bread and a card to each person. The man with the highest card would take the portion of bread which had the highest card beside it and down the line, Eating utensils were quite basic, consisting of a spoon, a wooden self made knife, and tin mugs. Varieties of containers were tin cans from Red Cross parcels, and modified at the discretion of each person. The German rations were supplemented by the well known Red Cross food parcels, which were

regularly distributed in the camp at Bankou during the short time that I was there. The parcels usually contained canned meat, powdered milk [Klim] or canned milk, canned or dried fruit [raisins, prunes and figs], various cheeses, chocolate, sometimes a pudding [especially in the English parcels] and always cigarettes. The parcels were from Canada, Britain, or the United States. Sometimes we would receive a parcel from Argentine which would contain corned beef, and some of the best old cheese that I have ever had. The Red Cross parcels saved many a prisoner's life, and just as importantly, gave some variety to life that could be stifling boredom. Also cigarettes that came in each parcel supplied the nicotine to which most of us were addicted, and withdrawal in our circumstances would have been devastating. The cigarettes became our currency which was used to gamble, or to purchase food either from the German guards, or from our more furiously addicted comrades. The equivalent was twenty cigarettes for one loaf of black bread.

Keeping busy to avoid the blues, and to make the time seem to move faster, took many different directions and forms. Again the Red Cross did supply some reading material including text books, novels, and some men received reading material from home. Airmen who had been teachers offered courses for those who wished to further their education level. There was other activity of various kinds, and what one wanted to do was up to the individual. Amazing crafts produced articles, both utilitarian and artistic, the raw material being tin cans, wood from packaging, yarn from sewing kits, and almost any thing that one could imagine. One item that most of us made was a miniature stove called a "smokey joe". The raw material again came from the parcel--- tin cans. The favorite can was powdered milk can. The cans were stacked; draft holes were cut and fastened together using strips of tin or whatever the imagination could think up. These little devices varied in complexity from very simple to those that had mechanical bellows or blowers to intensify the heat. Some lads became quite expert at cooking up puddings, cakes, and other marvelous concoctions. The "smokey joe" was quite efficient, enabling one to quite quickly boil a pot of water, or a pot of porridge with a few scraps of paper, or shavings of wood.

One of the gross amusements at night was the production of "blue angels". The diet of black bread and cabbage soup produced massive

flatulence and some of the lads found that they were methane producers. They would assume a position on their hands and knees, some one would light a match near their buttocks, and as they passed wind, a blue flame would momentarily flare up. Hard to believe that grown men would indulge in such diversions, but when bored the imagination is marvelous. One noticeable item missing from the conversation was sex, which was a great difference from the barracks back in England. Food was the usual subject of conversation in camp and the only time women were discussed was in there role in the preparation of food. In camp as in life, there were "wheeler-dealers" who bought and sold anything that might be desired by the boys. As noted previously the currency was cigarette, and some entrepreneurs were collecting I.O.U's, on the hope that they would collect when they came home after the war was over. Gambling was very popular, by dice, cards whatever was available. I was neither a gambler nor a trader, but did enjoy playing cards and checkers. Being classified as escape potentials we were not put out to work and as a matter of fact, I believe that we were exempt as NCO's. In the camp there was a group of Irish Guards that had been captured in North Africa five years previously. Amazing discipline ruled their lives, requiring them to keep their uniforms immaculate, their shoes spotless, their faces shaved each day. Their officers had them out in formation each day. When the camp had to be evacuated in January 1945, one of them became quite psychotic, probably because of the break in the routine.

The camp was surrounded by the usual double barbed wire fence, with a trip wire some ten feet in front of the inner fence. At each corner of the compound and at intervals, there were guard towers manned by sentries, who were armed with an automatic fire arm and a rifle. At our orientation by one of the guard officers [German] we were informed that the Geneva Convention required them to give an escaping prisoner a warning before he would be shot, and we should consider this to be the preliminary warning. If we tried to escape we would be shot without further warning. Also, we were warned that during an air raid we were to stay inside, on pain of being immediately shot if we were found to be outside. Shortly after my arrival we received a demonstration as to how serious they were on this point. At mid afternoon one day, the air raid siren sounded and we all went inside. After and hour or so the all clear signal came from the town, but had not yet been made in the camp. One

of the chaps who thought the air raid was over, dashed out to go to the cookhouse to prepare the rations for our daily meal, a shot rang out and he was mortally wounded on the run. Our senior officer made a very indignant protest to the camp commandant, pointing out that this was a violation of the letter and the spirit of the Geneva Convention. He was given an apology and explained that the guard that did the shooting had his whole family killed in an air raid a few weeks previously and obviously was in a state of anger which he took out on our comrade. He said that the guard would be transferred to a less vulnerable duty. This was the first time some of us had seen this sort of activity, and it certainly makes one think about being careful.

Shortly after arriving in camp, Christmas came and went. On Christmas day we were given a fairly generous portion of horse meat and potatoes in recognition of the day. On Sundays optional church services were held but I never did get around to one. One of the padres was from the British army, an Anglican I believe. Well over six feet tall, he could be seen around the camp, always trying to cheer people up and doing what he could to help any one in difficulty. Optimism was his constant presentation, always assuring us that the war would soon be over and we would all be going home. Jokes about the padre's optimistic encouraging stories circulated, and whenever someone would present an optimistic front, they would be accused of listening seriously to the padre. In camp was an illicit radio, purchased from a comprised guard, component by component, until there were enough parts to make a workable unit. These guards would be compromised in a variety of ways, by stealing some important part of his equipment or his note book, or in other imaginative ways, then threaten the guard with exposure to his more senior officer. This was a technique that was used in many different situations by prisoners who were looking for materials to help in preparing for escape, or just for getting something to make life more bearable. Getting back to the illicit radio, this was used to get the BBC news, which was a real booster of morale, especially during my imprisonment when the invasion was going so well, and it looked like there was no way that the Germans could prolong the war more than a few months. Where the radio was hidden in our camp, I do not know, but from other camp stories, the radio men found some very ingenious places to stow them. An almost a daily news bulletin would be prepared and read to the inmates of each hut while a watcher would

look out for the "goons" [German guards]. Most of the news was good, except during the German counter-attack at the Falaise Gap, when the Allies had to retreat. The German guards assured us that this was a major come back and that they fully expected the Allies to be driven back to England.

Shortly after New Year 1945, news came through of a major Russian offensive coming our way. Anxiously we listened to the daily news bulletin, looking forward to the day that we would be liberated. Strangely, I did not feel too concerned about the battle front passing through our camp, or whether or not we would be subject to the violence of the conflict. About January 10 we were informed by the Germans that we would not be left in Bankou for the Russians to overtake us, but that we would be evacuated toward the west. We were told to prepare for a forced march, so that by January 15, we were marched out onto the road, with our meager possessions gathered into a blanket roll. So began a trip not to be forgotten! Our clothing was grossly inadequate for a vicious Polish winter, mine consisting of an American army uniform and a greatcoat. Fortunately, I had three pairs of heavy woolen socks, and a pair of American army boots. We were instructed to march in columns of three, and that any attempt to escape would result in a shot to kill, and if an escape did take place, ten POW's would be shot. A few dogs, German shepherds were brought along to discourage any attempt to escape.

Winter in this part of Europe is much like the winter in northern Ontario, with temperatures down to thirty degrees below zero Fahrenheit, and 1945 winter was exceptionally severe. Over about twenty four days, we walked about one hundred and fifty miles. The first day on the march was clear but quite cold. Late in the afternoon we came to some barns, which were frame structures, with single sheeting of one inch lumber, showing cracks between the boards. They were much the same construction as Canadian hay barns of fifty years ago. It was with disbelief that we reacted to the announcement that we would spend the night in this structure. There was no food given to us, and we had to do with what ever we were able to bring with us from what was left of our last Red Cross parcel. By remaining in all of our clothing, crowded together, we were able to get through the night. The usual German greeting, "raus! raus!" got us up and on the road again. As we

trudged along the road became more crowded with civilians of all ages, but mostly women, children and old people, who were heading west to escape the possible oncoming Russians. Most were walking, pulling children, the old and infirm on sleds and hand wagons. Occasionally a family would have the luxury of a horse or a donkey, a dog, a goat, or a few chickens. To see these very vulnerable people heading out in this severe weather, one could not help thinking about ones grandparents, knowing that many of the old people would not survive this outrage.

Military personnel and equipment were moving east, and of course, had the right of way requiring all others to make way in the snow banks beside the roads. Each night we would be put into farm buildings, barns, or animal shelters- whatever was available. We soon learned how to hunker down to keep as warm as possible, however, very early in the march the prisoners began to have major problems. The second day several were unable to carry on. I remember one chap, a large man of about twenty years was pulled into our bivouac on a sled. He appeared to be moribund, unresponsive to questions. In the morning he was not to be seen, and his fate is unknown to me. What happened to him and to many like him, we have never been told, but by the time the trek was over our ranks were considerably reduced in numbers. Fortunately for me, I had several advantages. I was young, had experienced hard physical work through 'teen years, had a muscular, athletic physique, and had maintained my conditioning by walking the prison compound since my capture. Also I had not been a prisoner for long, and did not have a long period of malnutrition as some of my fellow prisoners had endured before the march; Even so, I developed muscle spasms in my thighs which made walking quite painful for a few days.

Day after day we continued, trudging through the snow and cold; and spending the nights shivering in some animal shelter with the wind whistling through. Our good padre patrolled the lines, helping those in difficulty and encouraging those who were flagging. He probably walked three times the distance that any of the rest of us did, while trying to mitigate the misery of others. One day I saw him carrying someone into the evening bivouac, and making sure that he had a tolerable place to spend the night. In Heaven, I am sure the padre will be occupying the most honored seat. The morning of January 30, 1944, dawned cold and blustery as we assembled to begin our days march. We were informed

that we had a very long walk, as we had to cross the Oder River, so that the bridges could be demolished. Apparently the Russians were advancing rapidly, and there was no way that the Germans were going to allow us to be taken by the Russians. By this time many of the prisoners were in bad shape, but were promised dire consequences, for any one dropping out on the road. Besides, where would we go? Late that afternoon the temperature dropped, the snow storm became a blizzard with fierce west wind in our faces. Soon we were trudging through several inches of fresh snow. Sometime through the night we came to the Oder River, crossed the bridge, and by morning, the snow stopped and we were led into a farm commune where we collapsed into the barns, and slept until mid afternoon. This was the most comfortable accommodation that we enjoyed so far on this "death march". Later that afternoon we were offered soup, bread and potatoes. We spent another night at this location, a very welcome respite after our horrific walk over the past three days.

Feb 2 the sun dawned brightly, and the air warmed up considerably. A long row of prisoners lined up along a low fence, with their footwear off, revealing black toes and blistered feet. No medical care was offered, or available, so that the only thing to do was to put on the best foot wear that one had and carry on. Fortunately for me, my feet were in relatively good shape, but my hands were numb, fiery red and very swollen, especially my fingers. For several years following the war I suffered from Raynaud's phenomenon, that is, in response to cold, my fingers would become blanched, and when warmed, would become, cyanotic and painful. Many of the familiar faces were missing on Feb.2, 1944. I am not aware of their eventual fate.

During our prolonged stay in the farm commune, some of us found some edible food. Under a threshing machine, there were beans and we filled our spare socks with hope that we would have an opportunity to cook them. A pile of sugar beets was raided, a mixed blessing in that they supplied some nourishment but produced diarrhea, which was very inconvenient given our circumstances. A couple of nights later while bunked in a hay loft, I fell down a ladder while answering the call of nature, landing on a wooden floor. As a result I had a clean up job, which, as you can imagine was complicated, embarrassing, and not too effective. The rest of the march was very difficult due to dysentery,

which was affecting the whole camp. By now the boys were in difficulty and our guards were having as much trouble as we were. By this time in the war the guards were mostly old men by military standards, veterans of the First World War and they were worn out. By February 8, we had arrived at a rail center near Goldberg, box cars were waiting for us, and our walk was over. Many of us who had experienced rail travel in box cars previously, were not too happy about the prospect, as we remembered those Thunderbolts, and their job of shooting up trains. The Germans refused to mark the POW trains so they could be identified as such and not combatants. However, we had no choice, climbed aboard completely, filling the space. There was no room to sit or lie down; the best one could do was to hunch down on one's knees. Remember, this was a group affected with dysentery, and very weakened after two and a half weeks on a forced march, in sub zero weather, on very little food, and inadequately clothed. We were three days on these box cars, with no food and very little water. Elimination was achieved by wriggling to the end of the car, where there was an opening above head height. The P.O.W. in need of relief was hoisted up, his nether end projected into the outside, and he would eliminate whatever was his need.

On February 11, 1944, we arrived at Luckenwalde, ten miles west of Potsdam, about sixty miles southwest of Berlin and fifty miles southeast of Magdeburg. We, a sorry remnant of the troop from Stalag Lufte VII B, staggered off the box cars, and made our way through the village to Stalag III A, where we found ourselves again behind barbed wire, in circumstances much worse than those at Stalag Lufte VII B. We were more fortunate than many, in that we did get into a barrack building with bunks. Many of the other occupants were living in tents without proper bunks or beds. Nevertheless, we were a sad, sick, exhausted group of men, many grieving comrades who had not been able to keep up, and whose fate was unknown. One of the Irish Guards had, early in the march, become completely psychotic, had to be tied to a stretcher and taken away, where to, nobody knew. It seemed totally unfair that this man, who had survived five years of the indignity of life in a prison camp, might not survive, now that the war was nearly over. Fortunately, our stalwart padre made it, as strong and patient as ever, giving forth great strength and encouragement. Stalag III A, Luckenwalde, was a hell-hole to be sure, consisting of about seventeen thousand prisoners of

several nationalities, Americans four thousand, British four thousand, Russian slaves three thousand, plus Serbians, Polish, Italian partisans, French, Norwegians, and others.There were several compounds consisting of huts one hundred feet, by forty feet, each hut containing bunks for one hundred and seventy men, arranged so that there would a few open spots for a table, chairs and a heating stove. Each hut was abutting a latrine and a row of taps for washing. The huts were infested with fleas, lice, and bed bugs. We had brought our blankets (two] from Bankou, but our personal gear, footwear, socks, etc. were in dismal condition following our "death march", and confinement to the box cars. However, it was better than freezing to death on the road or slowly dying on those dreadful box cars.

Nourishment was now totally dependent on the food that the Germans brought in. Hot water or Ersatz coffee was brought in about eight o'clock in the morning. Between noon and thirteen hundred hours, a pint of watery soup, with shreds of dried vegetables, cabbage, split peas, turnips or nettles, and perhaps, once a week, a strand of meat was served. Very occasionally, a very thin porridge would be served instead of soup. Later in the afternoon, a half dozen very small potatoes [ping pong size and with lots of rotten ones or partially rotted ones] sometimes with some margarine, and sometimes with a teaspoon of sugar. A bread ration, one loaf of very black bread to be shared by six to ten men, rounded out the German responsibility for the day's sustenance.

The camp was full of very sick men, as dysentery was still rampant, with the latrines fully occupied day and night. Men would collapse and have difficulty getting back to their bunks. Again, there was the padre, keeping watch, giving words of encouragement, and giving help to those who were having trouble walking. One of the P.O. W.'s had taken on the task of health orderly. He was an air crew member who had been badly burned when he was shot down, survived with severe scarring of the face and hands, and maybe more. He was in charge of a make shift "sick bay", advising fellow prisoners of methods of keeping as well as possible under the circumstances. He would direct parts of the camp food, like oatmeal, to those who were sickest. As a result of the circumstances surrounding his shoot down, he would have nightmares, during which

he uttered the most penetrating screams. His bunk mates would talk him down, so that he could go back to sleep.

Fleas, lice, and bed bugs were a major annoyance. Their presence presented a worry about the possibility of an outbreak of typhus fever. Fortunately, this did not occur, at least not in our compound, as far as we knew. Part of my daily routine was to go out, sit on the snow or grass, remove enough clothing to access all parts of my skin, turn the garments inside out, and pick off as many of the vermin as I could find on me, and my clothes. This at least, made me feel that I was keeping the population under control, but every day there was a new crop.

The worst crime in camp was any suggestion of collaborating with the Germans, who we now hated with a passion unimaginable. We would think about how well the Germans in Canadian POW camps were fed and housed and imagined how we would like to have the chance to reduce them to our present circumstances. The second worst crime was stealing food from a fellow POW. Often a compatible group would pool their food and prepare and eat it together. Usually one person would be responsible, and mostly it would work out well. But not always--- in one group the trustee was found to be helping himself when he had the opportunity and he thought no one was looking. After he was found out, he was shunned and ostracized, not only by his buddies, but by the whole hut. As mentioned before, the total obsession was food and cigarettes. Those with the worst addiction to nicotine, would sell their food for tobacco or cigarettes, the going rate of exchange, in good times, was one loaf of black bread for twenty cigarettes. As food became very restricted, the rate went up to one loaf for fifty cigarettes.

As the weeks went by, and the war news became more and more adverse for the German side, our guards were replaced by older and older men. the middle aged men were sent to the front to try to hold the Russians from taking over the country, Quite noticeably, the arrogance of the Germans, right up to the commandant, melted away, and they would remind us how well they personally behaved toward us, in hopes that we would befriend them when the Allies over ran the camp. During April 1945, it was obvious that the guards had civilian clothes under their uniforms, in case they would be able to pass themselves off as refugees, or other non combatants. Naturally with the older and older

guards, the control of the camp by the Germans began to break down. Where as in Bankou, during an air raid, any POW outside the barracks would be shot, now they milled around the compounds, while the bombers flew over, cheering loudly, while the security officers pathetically requested that they go into the barracks. An S. S. officer came to the camp to persuade British and Americans to join the "Saint George Brigade", which the Germans would organize, arm, and lead into battle against the Russians and save the world from communism. The best response that he received was a derisive horse laugh!

There was always an organization of the POW's, headed by the senior allied officer, who, at Luckenwalde, was a Norwegian, whom everyone respected. Various organizational requirements were delegated through the officers, and no doubt, through some NCO's, who were POW's in the camp. Not being involved in this hierarchy, I had little knowledge of the personnel or their activities, but this is well explained in a book that I have in my possession "Diary of a Kriegie" by Edward W. Beattie, Junior. This internal organization was very efficient, and had made plans for taking over command of the camp, when the Germans left. Actually, as the Germans lost control, the organization did assume responsibility, to assure that anarchy did not occur, and that enough discipline was in place to protect, persons and whatever food supply was left there, and to make sure that it was equitably distributed.

As April, 1945 arrived, news of the advancing Allies cheered us all up. The western front was advancing rapidly across Germany, so that we were hopeful that we would be liberated by the British or Americans. Still the Germans did not want us to fall into either the hands of the Russians or the Western Alliance. April 12 we were informed that we were to be moved by train into southern Germany, and we were to be ready for evacuation. The whole procedure was a mess, but eventually they rounded up about one thousand, mostly Royal Air Force POW's, and marched them to the railway station. Not wishing to get back on a box car, I, along with many others, managed to move around through the camp, evading the trek to the railway station. In any case, the group that went to the railway station was brought back into camp next day, as the Germans could not find a serviceable locomotive to pull the train. The whole episode was indicative of the demoralized state of our guards, who, as I mentioned earlier, were now old men. In the former

times when the Germans were full of confidence, they would never have put up with the passive resistance that was being used by the POW's.

During the next few days, we could hear the sounds of artillery to the east, signaling the approach of the Russian front. Also, there was increased air activity on the part of the German air force, passing overhead on their way to give some support to their retreating army. About April 15, 1945, a large number of night bombers struck Potsdam, which was ten miles east of our camp. Later we heard that five hundred bombers dropped there load on the railway junction there. Although they were probably twenty thousand feet high, the drone of there engines was overpowering, seemingly vibrating through and through one's body. When the bombs began to explode, the intense shock waves were incredible. What the effect of such an experience is, at close range can only be imagined. We had experienced close range bombing, but not from so many aircraft all at once. Every night from this time on, we could see the search lights, flashes of bursting bombs, hear the artillery out to the east. We now realized that the Russians, not the western Alliance, would be our liberators.The bombing raids intensified with the RAF working the night shift and the Americans the day shift. The artillery at the eastern front filled in any possible respite in between.

April 20, 1945, word came in that the Russians had broken through, about thirty miles east, and the Germans would be marching all seventeen thousand of us toward the American lines. However, no such thing happened. By April 21, 1045AM, the guards had all left the camp, and the POW's organization had taken over. Of course, the majority of the POWs were military, so that it was quite easy to exert a command of the situation. It was very important that we not present a hostile combatant attitude, as we were unarmed, and could be shot down without difficulty, if a German unit decided to do so. A SS unit was stationed in the woods to the south of us, approached the gates of the camp, and demanded that the POWs be seconded to them, to do things like dig trenches. Our officers reminded them that their request was out of order, as it was contravening the Geneva Convention. Fortunately, they did not insist, but reminded our officer in command, that they were in a position to destroy us, if we showed any hostile intention.We were in the unfortunate position of having to negotiate with any hostile

troops approaching us, because none of the German camp administrators remained in camp.

During the night of April 21, 1945, an unidentified air craft flew low over the camp with machine guns blazing. A pattern of noise like stones hitting the roof rattled across the hut. There was a great clatter as men jumped off their bunks in search of a more sheltered spot, although where that would be, I do not know. No one seemed to have been injured, and the next morning, the noise was explained by the presence of shell casings, scattered along the ground. Obviously, the air craft had been firing at a target beyond the camp, and not at us. The two weeks preceding April 22, was extremely chaotic and nerve wracking, because of the great uncertainty of our situation. Most of us were not privy to what was going on in the surrounding countryside, but were bombarded by rumors of German troops nearby, and of their malignant intentions toward us. On several occasions, we were said to be under threat of annihilation if any aggressive activity was exhibited by us. This possibly came from our own officers, in order to put away any heroic activity that might be anticipated by one of the POWS. Sounds of battle roared around us. We could see many fires burning, and had observed fierce air attacks on nearby Potsdam. The bomb blasts and the sound of artillery went on day and night.

At early daybreak of April 22, 1945, a small armored car came through the camp; the Russian officer had a discussion with our senior camp officer. We were told that he had informed the S.C.O. that the Germans had left Luckenwalde town, that we were to stay in the camp, and that the tanks would be coming through later in the day. As I remember it, a column of tanks, with troops, men and women, riding on the machines, came down the main road, through the camp. Most of the troops were definitely Oriental, presenting themselves as friendly, well fed and well dressed. They were carrying small arms of varying sorts. Their battle dress was quilted tunics and trousers, the women dressed the same as the men. They halted briefly, indicated that they had good feelings toward us, Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, and General Patton. They mounted the tanks and were away. One of the tanks drove through the barbed wire fence, then drove along for about fifty feet on top of the wire, and indicated that we should remove the rest. Many of the POWs took advantage of the new freedom, ranged outside the camp into the

town and the countryside. Many looted food and other objects which were small enough to carry off. Of course, the German civilians were terrified and did not resist, or if they did, the threat of bringing the Russians to deal with them, totally subdued them. After the many years, it is still a matter of some shame, the hateful things that some of us did, and the satisfaction that we derived by humiliating and terrorizing these human beings, who were now at our mercy. After a couple of forays outside camp, I could no longer participate, as these old people, women and children, reminded me of my relatives at home. Dropping bombs from an air craft five miles above, in the dark, on objects not seen, was a different matter than seeing helpless, frightened people with a face and eyes. In any case, after a couple of days, the administrative personnel arrived, informed us that there was still a war on, and that the Russian army could not be responsible for us outside the perimeter of our camp. The wire fence was repaired and it was obvious that we were still prisoners, but now our jailers were Russians instead of Germans.

As I remember, there was still very little food being distributed, and there was no sign of us being repatriated. For prisoners who had been through what we had been through, this was very hard to swallow. Also, some of our number had encounters with Russian soldiers, who had robbed them of personal items, like watches, rings, and badges, at the point of a gun. The Russian soldier appeared to us as very undisciplined, more often than not, apparently intoxicated, and exhibited extreme volatility, one moment being very friendly, the next raging and threatening. As well, there was still hostile activity, as evidenced by small arms fire nearby. Every day the camp became more and more crowded as wandering POWs and displaced persons arrived at the gates looking for food and shelter. Tents were erected in various parts of the fields around the camp to accommodate these people, some of whom were in extremis. One day mortar shells landed in the camp grounds, reminding us of the volatile conditions. After about a week, and the arrival of the Russians, we were notified by the administrator that we must all be registered by the Russians before we could be repatriated. When and how this would happen would be determined in Sagan or in Moscow, but it was expected that this would start in a few days. After we were all registered, we would probably be taken to Odessa on the Black Sea, and be repatriated by sea. This, in spite of the fact that we

knew that the Americans occupied Germany right up to the Elbe River, only sixty five miles away, at Magdeburg. Most had no desire to be tourists of southern Russia or Ukraine, but wanted to go home by the most direct route, and the shortest distance.

At about this time, the disputes over the politics of Poland, and indeed, of the whole of Eastern Europe. There was a provisional government for Poland, formed during the war, called the "Lublin Committee", based in Britain, consisting of Polish dignitaries that had escaped to Britain in 1939. The British and Americans wished to have this body recognized as the legitimate interim government of Poland pending free elections. Russia did not agree with this at all, and obviously wished to, and did, install, a communist regime. Harsh words were being exchanged over the matter, and the situation was becoming very tense. Great anxiety was generated within our ranks, regarding the whole mess, and some feared that we might be held as pawns in this disagreement. As a result, some of us began to contemplate escaping from camp and making our own way west to the American zone. As a matter of fact, every day, more and more struck out. Some were apprehended by the Russians and returned to camp. We were warned by the senior British Officer, that it was extremely hazardous in the countryside, that the Russians would no longer recognize us as POWs, if they found outside the camp. There were rumors that the Russians had rounded up the Russian slave laborers and Russian POWs, and had shot them as collaborators. In this highly volatileand tense atmosphere, we were becoming desperate and more and more impatient.

On May 7, 1944, there arrived in camp, a convoy of American trucks from Magdeburg, to evacuate the American and British prisoners. There was great exhilaration, as the prisoners clambered aboard the trucks, anticipating the start of their journey home. Suddenly a corp. of Russian troops arrived with machine guns on their arms, and the POWs were ordered to get out of the trucks. Everyone was devastated and outraged. The empty trucks left through the gates, and we were left to imagine our fate.

During our stay at Luckenwalde, I had become very good friends with a young man from Saskatchewan, name of Larry Goheen, and as a matter of fact, we had trekked together during the terrible march. Following

our great disappointment, we sat down, discussed the situation, and decided to take our chances on escaping the camp, and making our own way back to the American lines. We gathered what little food that we had, and decided to go out through the fence that night. Over the past two weeks, we had seen many horrors. We had made a trip through the Russian prison compound, where we saw the worst conditions that could be imagined. The living quarters were absolutely filthy, smelled to high heaven, and made our horrible living quarters seem like a hotel. One bright spot was a chapel that the Russian prisoners had built in part of a hut, with icons, paintings, and an altar fabricated from scraps of lumber, tin cans and cardboard. Finding such a structure amid all that squalor was unbelievable. In the chapel were some dead bodies. In the barracks were skeletons of men who were not even capable of standing, and who our medical office said would probably die. With all the other unpleasantness of the place, we decided that we had to take our fate into our own hands, and get out of this terrible place, and maybe get home.

We had scouted the perimeter of the camp, could see the truck convoy had set up a bivouac about a mile or so away near a wooded area. We also knew that close to the camp fence, there was an irrigation ditch, deep enough to conceal us once we got outside the fence. As soon as it was dark, we were on out way, under the fence, down the ditch to where the American trucks were parked. We approached an NCO and asked him if he would take us with him when he went back through the lines and across the Elbe River. We both had American army uniforms from the Red Cross, although they were badly worn and not too well maintained. The sergeant readily agreed to do what he could, we slept by his truck, and early next morning we were on our way. At one point we were stopped by a Russian patrol, the leader of the unit indicated that we were to follow them for clearance. It was obvious that the officer was drunk, as were the soldiers. After following the Russian patrol for a short distance, the sergeant told the driver to swing off at the first road, and shake off the Russians. The maneuver was successful and we continued our way.

The sergeant explained that we would have to avoid any check points, as we continued our way to the Elbe River, and especially when we were crossing the river, as we had no valid identification, and would

certainly be detained. However, he reassured us that he knew a way to get through, which turned out to be a bridge which was demolished, but had enough superstructures above the water, that it could be crossed on foot. This demolished railway bridge was our passage to freedom, which we crossed by hanging onto the railings and wading where necessary. On reaching the west bank, we were in the American occupation zone, and finally free again. We were met by an American soldier who directed us to an army camp where we were greeted like long lost brothers, and we joined a crowd of newly landed POWs, which had made their way back to the west as we had. We were taken to the mess hall where we were served typical American army rations, the first real meal that we had seen for months, and for some, it had been for years. It was all like a dream banquet, something that we had been talking about day and night for months and years. The white bread was unbelievable, looking like angel food cake, and the stew, vegetables just magnificent. The mess sergeant apologized for the poor grub--- he didn't know we were coming, and had to give us what he had on hand. The food was to us so fabulous that we thought that he was joking, but finally we realized that he was serious. We thoroughly reassured him that we were very appreciative of everything, and we could not think of a better first meal. As usual under such circumstances, our stomachs filled quite quickly, and we were not able to eat as much as we thought we could. After eating, we were given sleeping accommodation on G. I. army cots, which felt like the most luxurious beds possible. Beautiful spring time weather further added to our contentment, and when we had settled, we joined the soldiers around a camp fire. Most of the soldiers were African Americans who amused themselves by telling very tall tales about how clever and well trained and enduring were their coon dogs back in the states.

We spent the night at Magdeburg in a barrack, sleeping soundly in our super comfortable beds, fitted with bed sheets. What luxury! Next morning we piled into an army bus and moved on to a place called Hildersheim, where we were billeted in a former military officer's club, in very luxurious surroundings. We got to enjoy these very comfortable digs for a couple of days before there was transportation to take us to Brussels, Belgium. This was my first and last flight in a Dakota air craft and my first flight since being shot down six months before.

In Brussels we were lined up, showered, de-loused, given clean clothes, and again accommodated in military quarters in an old hotel. The de-lousing procedure was crude but effective. A pressurized hose was placed down the pants, and in turn, the shirt, and a blast of D.D.T. powder administered. That was the end of the infestation that we had endured which had been with us for many weeks. It is hard to imagine the relief that we felt at being rid of those tenacious little blood suckers. Looking back, I now know how fortunate we were to have avoided typhus fever, which probably would have been lethal to many.The old hotel in Brussels was very comfortable, and we really enjoyed being treated like human beings again. To the people of Brussels we were heroes, able to roam the streets at will, nothing being off limits. However, we had little or no money, probably fortunately, as we were feeling very good to finally be free, and able to wander wherever. Although I cannot remember attending a pay parade, I do think that we did receive some spending money, and I remember pub crawling with my friend Larry. One place had a bar and in front and a brothel in the back. My friend Larry was very interested in the girls, but of course could not partake because he did not have enough cash. However, he did pursue the madam, without success. Because he was an air man who had done his part in liberating Brussels, he tried to talk her into servicing him for love. When she became occupied with paying customers, he slipped behind the bar, and picked up two large bottles of champagne, and successfully spirited them out of the premises, hidden in his new battle dress tunic [the ones that we had been recently issued after we had been deloused]. Some way or other, we got back to our lodgings where he disposed of the most of the champagne by himself. As I remember, it tasted like sour apple juice to me, and he was quite welcome to it. From that time we drifted apart as it became obvious that Larry was a serious alcoholic, to the extent thathe was beyond the possibilities of an enjoyable friendship. My family background just would not let me drink like he did. The loss of his companionship was difficult because he was such a decent person when sober, and because we had been through such difficult times together.

About May 15, 1945 we were loaded into a Lancaster bomber and flown to Ford airport in southern England. Most of the personnel on the Lancaster were from India and I think that they were Sikhs with their turbans. From Ford air port, we were bussed to Bournemouth, to await

a ship home to Canada. At Bournemouth, I was informed that I had received a commission, just as I was shot down and taken prisoner. This was a surprise! Immediately, I had to purchase an officer's uniform and kit, leave the sergeant's mess. The sergeant's mess suited me much better, being much more informal, and the NCOs being more down to earth. However, my pay doubled, and the accommodation, food, and other perquisites quite gratifying. Having all the housekeeping looked after by maids and batmen, and having no duties, we were at liberty to explore the town and countryside. Streetlights brightened the night, and a feeling of carnival was in the air. Dances, parties, hikes along the sea shore occupied much of the time. The beaches were still strewn with tank traps and barbed wire. A standing pass allowed overnight trips or longer, as long as we registered with the Orderly office. London, not too far away, beckoned, and a group of us managed to get there by train. Some way or other we were able to talk the railway out of charging us a fare. In London we split up to visit our own particular interests, which to me were the places that I had studied in British history. Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's cathedral, London Bridge, the Tower of London, Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park, the Serpentine, was all fascinating. Here, there and almost every where, there was bomb damage, and in places, complete devastation. There still was a lot of various air craft traffic around, which still produced a problem for me, after the bombing and strafing that we had been subjected to in Germany, One always had a great urge to duck under the nearest shelter.

Early in June, 1945, my name appeared on a repatriation draft order, we were bussed to Southampton to board the Louis Pasteur, a pre war French cruise liner, and we were on our way home. This trip was a far cry from that we had taken a year previously, going in the opposite direction. As an officer, I now had a cabin with one other person. Meals were served in a dining room, with white linen table cloths, napkins and regular cutlery and dishes. Waiters attended and there was some choice of foods. Of course, black out at night was not necessary, June weather was very pleasant, and the Atlantic crossing was without incident, The first sight of land aroused feelings of great excitement, and a great longing to see my family again. As we disembarked at Halifax we were greeted by a welcoming committee which offered us ice cream, all kinds of cakes, cookies tea, and cigarettes. From the area we were directed to

the railway station boarded a train and were on our way, only this time we had a sleeping car, As we traveled through the Maritimes we were greeted by cheering crowds. At a small New Brunswick town called Campbellton there was a kind of informal reception, with a marvelous spread of all kinds of food and non-alcoholic drinks. Speeches were delivered telling us what excellent fellows we were, and expressing gratitude for the job that we had done. At Lachine, Quebec, we were put up in the station where we had been before going to Halifax a year and a bit ago. There we were interviewed, almost like a debriefing, and had a medical examination. In Brussels we were lined up, showered, de-loused, given clean clothes, and again accommodated in military quarters in an old hotel. The de-lousing procedure was crude but effective. A pressurized hose was placed down the pants, and in turn, the shirt, and a blast of D.D.T. powder administered. That was the end of the infestation that we had endured which had been with us for many weeks. It is hard to imagine the relief that we felt at being rid of those tenacious little blood suckers. Looking back, I now know how fortunate we were to have avoided typhus fever, which probably would have been lethal to many.

Montreal, a few miles away beckoned and the boys felt that it was party time again on home turf. However, the welcome that we were becoming used to was not there, and we had to go into town in groups to ovoid hostile action by the zoot suiters, young French Canadians that were still angry about conscription. My friend Larry was in bad shape. One morning his bed was unoccupied; I found him lying on the grass, unable to stand or walk because of over indulgence. During the stay at Lachine, I again failed to see him in a sober state, and after leaving there, I never heard from him again. After a very few days, we were given leave, and left on the last leg of my journey home. By this time I had become very good friends with Edwin Clinton, a native of Algoma, from just north of Thessalon, Ontario, so that we were on the same train home, through Ottawa, Mattawa, North Bay, Sudbury, then to Bruce Station. From Sudbury, I had called my Aunt Flora Lediett, to tell her that I was in Canada, on my way through on the local train. I told her that my parents did not know that I was coming home today as I was embarrassed to meet them in an emotional encounter in public at the railway station. On

the short stop at Blind River, where Aunt Flora lived, I went down on the platform and there was my Aunt, Uncle, and my cousin Norman. We had a very animated visit on the platform, but, of necessity, a very short one, and I was on my way again. As soon as my Aunt arrived back home she telephoned my parents, and of course they were at Bruce station when the train pulled in.

That day I was a real emotional mess, and in my memory, it is like a dream. Of course, I remember that my mother, father, my brother Neil was there but I can't remember who else if anyone. Quickly, I picked up my kit bags, piled them into the old Ford, and we were heading toward home. In the car, my mother kept pinching my leg. Apparently, when the air force sent my belongings home they sent only one shoe, and she had it in her mind that I might have lost a leg in action. The news that my grandfather Cooper had died a few weeks earlier was a great shock, as he was a wonderful grandfather, one of my all time favorite people. When the news had come through in November, 1944 that I was missing in action he had remarked, "We will never see Jim again", No doubt, he remembered losing his son Lex in the war of 1914-1916. Cancer of the bowel was his terminal disease, and although he had a very distressing few weeks, he did die in his own home.

Among my very earliest memories, was the building of my grandfather Cooper's home in Dunn's Valley, in the early thirties. This was quite a grand structure four story house, finished in stucco, in which was embedded, quartz pebbles. When the sun shone on Grandpa's house, it sparkled like a diamond. In the small Dunn's valley graveyard, my grandparents Cooper grave is neat and well kept, the stone reading "Pioneers, A day of work well done, a night of rest is won". Although I was glad to be home, and with my family again, things did not seem to be the same, and I knew that I had to find a different kind of life somewhere else. My brother Neil and his wife Gwen, had taken over the home farm, and were living in the family home along with my parents and youngest sister Muriel. My eldest brother Murdoch, and his wife Thelma and family had taken over the farm to the east, where my father had settled when he was first married, and had built a house about 1935. My grandfather McPhee, and his wife, my step grandmother, had moved out of the community to Rydal Bank. My eldest sister Sarah Harrison lived in Sault Ste. Marie, my sister Jessie Mills lived in Ophir

not far from my parents. Sister Ethel Broad lived in Dunn's Valley near Skookum Lake, with husband Fred, and her three children, on the family homestead. Shortly after the war, Ethel and Fred moved to Skookum Lake, where they began a tourist resort business, including the guiding of persons interested in fishing and hunting. Florence, who was two years older than I, lived in Sarnia, where she worked in a bank. Muriel, who was two years younger than I, and who always was considered to have "delicate health", lived with my parents until her death at the age of thirty two. She had a congenital heart defect, and developed diabetes a year or two before her death, in the early nineteen sixties.

During my furlough, following repatriation, I visited many friends, relatives, and spent a few days at the home of my friend, Edwin Clinton in a small hamlet called Hooverville. Located about twenty miles north of Thessalon, this settlement disappeared under the water of Tunnel Lake, when the hydroelectric dam was built on the Mississauga River about nineteen fifty. Eddie's father and brothers were active in the tourist business, guiding the bush sportsmen to the best fishing and hunting territories. Eddie and I had a great time exploring the bush on foot and by canoe. On one expedition, we crossed a lake, Cummings Lake, by canoe, accompanied by two American tourists. Shortly after embarking, a wind came up to such an extent that we had doubts about making it to shore, In those days it was not the custom to wear life jackets, so that, if we had capsized we would probably have drowned. The wind was in our faces and the waves too high to turn and run with the wind, so that we just had to keep the paddles going until we reached the shore ahead some nine or ten miles distant. The relaxed life style of the Clinton's, was very attractive and appealing, so much so that Eddie's ambition was to stay there for the rest of his life, and make a living at whatever came along. He eventually purchased a small general store that he and his wife are probably still tending.

In nineteen forty six, the road from Bruce Mines to Skookum Lake was lined on both sides by homes, mostly subsistence farms, some tourists businesses, a few general stores, and garages with gas pumps. The hamlets were Rydal Bank, Mount Zion, Rock Lake, Ophir, a d Dunn's Valley. There were public schools at each of these places, and churches at Rydal Bank, Rock Lake and Dunn's Valley. A shortage of qualified teachers necessitated the hiring of high school graduates to assume the

duties of teaching public school for some years. The above mentioned schools have been closed, and the communities, as I knew them, drastically altered. Most of the people now have jobs in the Sault, and very few work the farms. Shortly before my grandmother Cooper died, she commented that when she had arrived in the area, there were no churches or schools and when she left [died] there would be no schools or churches.

Following my furlough, I was posted to a station located at Eglinton Avenue and Yonge Street in Toronto, at a building which had been the Eglinton Hunt Club. After only a short stay there I was posted to Camp Borden, where they were sorting out the few returning personnel, looking volunteers for the Asian Campaign, which was still going on. However, early in August nineteen forty five, the Americans dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered, and it was obvious that there would be mass demobilization. A great need for staff to handle the release centers was upon the military, and those of us who had been repatriated early, were put into training programs to achieve the administrative skills necessary to do the job. As a result, I was posted to Ottawa for a quick course in administration which lasted about six weeks. This was a very pleasant time consisting of classes for six to eight hours a day, and leaving lots of time to explore our nation's capital. Ottawa is quite a beautiful place, with spacious parks, and at that time, occupied by large numbers of young people who were in a carnival mood, ready for a good time. Accommodation was in a hotel, not fancy by today's standard, but luxurious by what I had been used to for the last three years. My room mate was a Group Captain, which at first was a bit intimidating, but as time went on, and as there were many high ranking officers on virtually every street corner I adjusted. The Group Captain was a silent type, which suited me very well. One thing that did not suit was a shower which was not protected from the fluctuations caused by the flushing of toilets or the turning on of another tap. The result was a water stream that fluctuated from scalding hot to freezing cold. However, the course was quite enjoyable, the time passed quickly, I learned a lot, and I was soon on my way to #7 Release Center, in Calgary. The station was to the northwest of the city, on a rising piece of land, from which we could look down on the city, and up to the west toward the foothills and the Rocky Mountains. The air was cool and crisp, the atmosphere relaxed, and the people of

Calgary friendly and relaxed. Officer's quarters were very comfortable, and I had a batman to keep my room neat, press my uniform and shine the brass.

On being introduced to my place of work, I found myself in charge of one hundred clerks of varying classification and rank. Fortunately, by this time I was wise enough to spot the sergeant who knew the works, took a liking to me, and guided me through the ropes, so that I did not have any serious difficulty. Of course, I was very green in the field of administration, and could easily have found myself out of my depths. He was a man of probably thirty years, which to me was old; he knew the ropes and appreciated peace and good order. I was certainly very appreciative of his support, and he was appreciative that I acknowledged his know-how. My title was Officer Commanding Reception Wing. I was responsible for assembling the records of the personnel coming through for discharge, sorting out the appropriate records into the order of their progression through the process of discharge. One of my titles was Honours and Awards Officer, which meant that I had to assess from their records, the campaign badges that they were entitled to. To this day, I am amazed that things went so smoothly, considering the thousands of air men that went through during the two and one half months that I was there.

While there I decided that I was going to have a real try at becoming a medical doctor. In the officer's mess, nearly everyone was a medical doctor, there to give the troops a medical assessment and clearance before discharge. One of the things that doctors do when they are together is talk shop, and these chaps were no exception. Even though they were speaking the medical jargon, I found it to be intensely interesting. Also noticeable, was that they did not appear to be that much brighter than the rest of us and I concluded that if they could make it through medical school, perhaps I could also. Many of the officers lived off the station and went home at night, which meant that the mess was not crowded. Often the only ones left was the Roman Catholic padre and me. The padre was quite a sociable fellow that had a real fondness for wine and spirits. We had some very good conversations over many a glass of beer, wine or spirits. Fortunately, by the first of December, the mass of the troops had gone through the discharge process, my job became redundant. At that time I assembled

my own records, had my medical, received my discharge papers and was on my way home, a civilian again. While I was in the service, I had some bouts of tonsillitis; apparently my tonsils were quite large, so that the medical officer recommended that I have my tonsils out before starting back to school. I was to report to my own civilian doctor when I arrived home, and was to do whatever he and I decided. Shortly after getting home I went to see Dr. Victor Grigg, who agreed with the air force M.D. and I was booked into the Red Cross Hospital in Thessalon. By the way, Dr. Grigg was the doctor that delivered me at my parent's home in McPhee's Valley in 1925. Apart from a very sore throat, the tonsillectomy was uneventful, and in ten more days I felt that I was ready to take on whatever the future held for me.

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