

It had been a case of now or never, I was acutely aware at that crucial moment that we must have been slightly below a height of one thousand feet ever heading downwards, so I wasted no time in pulling my ripcord, I had only a small margin to play with. Simultaneously, mindful of the close proximity of the ground I attempted to assist the master chute by trying to help out the pilot chute using my left hand. The idea was to facilitate the quicker opening of the chute in view of the lack of both height and wind. Thankfully the parachute opened with a crack, I experienced a sudden jolt, and felt the webbing straps jerk tight. Swinging slightly under my white canopy I was on my way, I was floating down. Our stricken Wimpey had been under intense fire from the ground defences, and at the moment I dropped through the open hatch, which must have been somewhere around seven hundred feet, light flak bursts were exploding all around me, and the aircraft. During the split seconds after I jumped the disabled Wimpey could have been hit. With eyes, and mind concentrating solely on my emergency exit I did not see anything happen to the kite during those last few brief moments, but the stricken aircraft had crashed into the ground before I had landed on terra firma, so it had really been tough and go as far as my longevity was concerned. In the darkness I hit the ground fairly heavily, winded, and slightly bruised but otherwise intact, the terrain was fairly soft with a thick covering of long grass which helped to cushion my fall. The searchlights had now been switched off, instinctively I pressed the quick release box to discard my parachute harness, pulled in the parachute rigging lines, rolled up the chute into a rough bundle, then removed my "Mae West", and hid it in the undergrowth. Savouring the cool night air I simply sat down amongst the grass ruefully meditating on the stark fact that I was well and truly shot down. What had happened to countless others, and many of my mates, had at long last caught up with me. Surrounded by the blackness, and the now apparent utter silence, I collected my wits, drew a deep breath, and looked up at the stars. They seemed to have a new meaning as I silently told myself not to be so bloody stupid, I was alive, and in one piece. What of the other lads? I knew the skipper had no time to get out, I had seen no other chutes but in the end overtaking events had happened far too suddenly to contemplate. I had landed some several hundred yards from the spot where I thought our Wimpey had crashed, but in the ground level darkness I was not certain of which direction I could not see any tell tale glow if it was burning. While I was sitting collecting my thoughts the searchlights were switched on again, but this time the beams were directed horizontally along the ground illuminating the whole area of the countryside. This action quickly brought me out of my lethargy, and I very smartly hid my parachute bundle in the long grass. In the brightness of the illuminated conditions I could see in the distance that German soldiers were commencing to search the area. They seemed to be well spread out, and one of their number was advancing slowly in my general direction.

Despite the wide avenues of light some areas of darkness persisted, but I still do not comprehend how this member of the Wehrmacht failed to spot me, but he passed by about fifty yards from me. I had concealed myself as best I could, which meant I laid full length in the grass hugging the earth. In such a position I laid doggo, and after a short time the searchlights were extinguished, the night was dark, and silent once again. I had not the slightest idea of my whereabouts, but in the circumstances assumed I was somewhere on the French mainland, how wrong I proved to be. It did not seem to me as if any of the other lads in the crew had managed to bale out during those last few hectic seconds, the kite had crashed so quickly, more or less simultaneous with my exit, so my thoughts were for the worst. In solitary state amidst the cold, inhospitable, and impenetrable pitch darkness of my surroundings I gave up all thoughts of an immediate move from my present position. It was obvious that I would not be able to see where I was going, so I decided to bed down for the night amidst the long, damp grass, and await daylight.

As I lay sprawled out in the long, damp grass amidst the then unknown French countryside I once again reflected on our collective misfortune, and singly my own good fortune, I was bloody lucky to be alive, and physically intact. My thoughts then centred on the remainder of the crew, Bill, Jim, Johnny, and finally poor old

Fergy who had vanished through the open front hatch just before the kite had gone out of control, a tragic occurrence, which was even more so in the case of our unfortunate spare bod who had been lucklessly pitchforked into the deep end as a member of our crew at the shortest of notices, I was not aware of his name till later. The time was somewhere between 2130 and 2000 hours, a cold damp night was in the offing so I wrapped the silken folds of my parachute around my body to keep warm,

and tried to sleep, it did not come easy, at the back of my mind was the nagging uncertainty concerning the fate of the other lads. I pondered on the thought that I should make an attempt to approach the wreck of our crashed Wimpey. No, I told myself, although the scene of the crash was not that far away I would never have found the locale in the extreme darkness. On the other hand the Wehrmacht would have acted swiftly, and obviously posted several armed guards around the wrecked aircraft until the following morning when they would undoubtedly sift through the wreckage. All these thoughts kept flashing through my tired mind, and little did I realise that within twenty four hours I would know that the worst had happened. Enveloped by the black stillness of the night it was quite a time before my mind ceased its turmoil, and roughly but adequately wrapped in my silk cocoon amidst the wet herbage, I slowly drifted off into an uneasy sleep. During the early daylight hours of the following morning I was abruptly awakened by the noise of a familiar sound, which startled me momentarily. Half asleep I rubbed my eyes, jerked myself into a sitting position, and took in the

scene. I was not daydreaming, the familiar noise was being made by a column of German soldiers who were singing with remarkable verve one of their popular marching songs. These jackbooted Wehrmacht types were apparently relishing the the cold, fresh morning air as they marched along a nearby road which was just over a couple of hundred yards from my position. Wet with the morning dew, I quickly gathered my wits, and was up on my feet in a flash to smartly roll up the silken folds of my parachute to then hide the bundle under, and amongst some adjacent bushes. Fortunately I was concealed from view of the marching, voiciferous German troops, and when they had passed by I waited until their singing voices had almost faded in the distance, at which point I took my leave and took off across the fields. I made steady progress across the undulating countryside avoiding the roads, and lanes. It proved to be slow going the terrain was rough, but the main job was to keep my weather eye open for any sign of German troops. Some time later I came across a hamlet, comprising of only a small group of houses, so without any degree of hesitation I took the bull by the horns, and knocked solidly on the first available door in an endeavour to wangle either food or drink. I received neither as that door, and others remained closed in my face, nobody wanted to know me. No doubt the French occupants suspected I was connected with the fireworks of the previous night, surprised faces just gazed at me wideeyed through their windows as if I had just arrived from outer space. My limited French spoken loudly to penetrate their inner sanctum only made known I was "Anglais RAF", but those words failed to make any difference, and no help was forthcoming. Eventually, with an air of frustration, I abandoned my efforts, and left the timid villagers to themselves to continue my onward plod across the fields, and valleys, hoping for a lucky break.

Retrospectively I cannot say I blamed the French villagers, few in numbers residing on a small island occupied by German armed forces there was not much scope for assistance in such circumstances. Of course I was not aware of my true geographical position, obviously I was under the impression that the firm ground under my feet was part of the French mainland. I only realised my true whereabouts after my capture. Only then was it apparent that I had, somewhat fortuitously, baled out over Belle Ile, a small fortified island in the Bay of Biscay, which is situated north west of St. Nazaire. One might say I had experienced a close call, my lucky star surely was at its zenith, surrounded on all sides by an invisible expanse of rough sea who could have thought I would have the extreme good fortune to alight on solid earth. Contrarily, I would no doubt have been a candidate for a watery grave, or in other words would have "Gone for a Burton". I was then a non-swimmer, and in any case with the added difficulties of an enveloping chute canopy I do not think I would have been able to overcome the extremely violent sea conditions typical of the Bay of Biscay, especially in the pitch darkness of that particular night.

Disappointed at my lack of progress with the French villagers I pushed on steadily. Amidst my rural surroundings I plodded through either long damp grass, outlying parts of ploughed fields, and rough ground. This combination made for both slow, and hard going with me wearing sweaty, clumsy flying boots which were ideal for flying purposes, but certainly not meant for walking the countryside. I still maintained a vague belief that I was somewhere on the mainland, but apart from that with no visual evidence available up to now, I was really in the dark. As I kept to the open country I obviously did not see any signposts whatsoever or any sizeable villages either. I must have presented a very suspicious, and conspicuous figure with my heavy fleecy lined Irvin flying jacket together with boots overlapped with thick long white socks, but there was nothing I could do about that. At this point of my evasion attempt very little thick wooded cover was available except for the odd copse dotted here, and there, therefore on the course I was taking the countryside was composed, in the main, of hedged fields, although the landscape remained undulating. Coming across a small thicket with a degree of protection I found a likely spot amongst the bushes where I decided to stop and take a well earned rest, to hell with the consequences. Hidden from view amidst the bushes I lit up to smoke one of my remaining cigarettes, and at the same time wondered how I would resolve my predicament. The chance of local assistance seemed to be very remote, especially in view of the apparent extreme scarcity of the French occupants of this area.

Some time later during the afternoon, after continuing on my way, I had been checking my rear path constantly, and all had seemed well, but then unexpectedly I had company. Some way behind me I noticed what looked to me to be a civilian riding a bicycle seemingly attempting to follow roughly the path I was taking. Feeling a wee bit apprehensive about his actions I stopped abruptly several times to look back in his direction, and observe his reactions. The situation did not look too good to me as he also came to a halt when I did, and after several repetitions of the act he suddenly disappeared from the scene. His suspect behaviour gave me cause for concern, he could have been a German collaborator. Whether the visual evidence was circumstantial or otherwise was something I would never be able to prove, but shortly afterwards armed German motor cycle combinations were tearing all around the surrounding countryside. At once I increased my pace to leave this spot well behind, and on this first day of March I was now perspiring profusely as a result of my efforts, my flying clobber did not help matters. In between rests, and the odd crafty smoke I was then making somewhat slower progress, and the time was around 4.30 pm. In a tired fashion I half ran or stumbled down a steep grassy slope at the foot of which ran a small country road or lane which was not very wide. That proved to be the spot where my luck ran out for as I checked my downward momentum at the foot of the slope I ran headlong into the path of a German Army motor cycle combination, which was occupied by two soldiers, the non driver was sitting behind a machine gun in the side car. The conveyance was heading directly towards me as I hit the road, it was much too late to make a run for it, they had me dead to rights, it looked as if the game was up. The episode was rather comical really, like a scene from a silent movie. As we met face to face the helmeted German driver momentarily gave me an astonished glance, which was mutual, not a shout was heard, except for the engine noise all was incredibly silent. The German pair sped merrily on their way, and I quickly, but dispiritedly made off in the opposite direction, but my getaway proved to be extremely shortlived. The penny must have dropped, for within a few seconds there was the harsh sound of squealing brakes, the Krauts were back meaning business, with the soldier occupying the side car swinging his machine gun menacingly in my direction. He bawled out "Hande Hoch" several times, I did not have to understand the lingo to realise what he meant, there was no answer to what he implied, just an upward movement of the arms on my part. I was now well, and truly in the bag without even exploring my escape kit, such as it was.

The Wehrmacht motor cycle combination now had a crew of three, my captors did not have much to say, gesticulations did the trick, and I was then taken post haste to their Army unit headquarters which proved to be only a short distance away from the scene of my capture.

Inside the building it seemed that all and sundry had gathered to take a gander at the "Tommy" Air Force prisoner, but no attempts were made to interrogate me. Several of the Wehrmacht officers present spoke English very well, and the ensuing conversations were carried out in a light hearted vein, typical of one combatant to another, when the war in general terms was discussed. Inevitably, one of their number asked me the sixty four dollar question "Who did I think was going to win the War"?. It is sufficient to say that they all laughed heartily at my obvious reply, but I was certainly no comedian .

Another of his Wehrmacht colleagues then asked me how many bombing raids I had flown over his homeland, I did not see any reason to refuse his request, and when I told him he wanted to know why I was not wearing my medal ribbons. I gave a wry smile, and a shrug of the shoulders, everything else was irrelevant. During those early hours of my captivity I must say that I was treated very well, these enemy soldiers were ex front line troops, and there was no rough stuff which I would no doubt have received if I had fallen into the hands of either S.S. units or our Gestapo friends. Before I left this army unit an hour or so later they provided me with a good meal, I remember it well, which consisted of a plateful of mashed potatoes with parsley, accompanied by two fried eggs, and a large mug of ersatz coffee to wash it down. The occasion was noteworthy inasmuch as it was the last decent meal I would enjoy for a long time. Shortly afterwards, flanked by a couple of soldiers, I was taken by car to the main port or town which must have been Le Palais, situated on the east coast of Belle Isle. After entering the road along the sea front the car finally came to a stop outside a prominent building which was flying the German flag. This no doubt was the main headquarters of the German forces on the island, which included the Flak and Searchlight units responsible for the eventual demise of our Wimpey. When I alighted from the car I noticed some yards away the major part of the fuselage of a crashed Hampden bomber. Minus wings, and tail boom the wreckage was positioned on the adjoining quayside, the kite had probably been shot down whilst on a minelaying venture a year or more previous.

I was then escorted inside the main H.Q., a rifle butt in the small of my back helped to propel me into an adjoining room. A severe looking Feldwebel searched me, it was goodbye to my escape kit, cigarettes, and matches I had nothing else on my person. With the preliminaries over I was once more motioned into action to be eventually paraded before the head man, the Officer Commanding the whole set up on the island. As I stood before him in his office I was surprised to see that he was a senior Kriegsmarine (Naval) officer, and I do not think he was very impressed with his dishevelled RAF "terrorflieger" prisoner. It proved to be a very short interview, certainly not an interrogation. During our brief confrontation he informed me that the remainder of my comrades in the crew were killed when our bomber crashed, and in confirmation he allowed me to examine individually all the service identity discs which were on his table. Serenely, I slowly checked the names on each set of discs, sadly they were all present, except, of course, for poor old Sgt. Ferguson's. As an old hand at the game I had suspected that the worst had happened, but the revelation of the true facts was still hard to take. When all the bad news had infiltrated I disclosed to the German C.O. the circumstances in which Sgt. Ferguson had, as far as I knew, fallen through the front escape hatch. To give this Commanding Officer due credit, he listened very patiently, and admirably to my story, and when I had finished he remarked that in view of the circumstances he would arrange for a boat search to be made in an endeavour to try and find Fergy's body. Apparently He was as good as his word for later on when I was languishing in solitary confinement I was informed that a search of the local sea area had been unsuccessful. It now seemed as if I was the only survivor of our six man crew.

After my unfortunate session with the German C.O. I was whisked away, accompanied by the inevitable armed escort, to begin my first spell of solitary. That same evening I was thus incarcerated in an ancient "Bastille" type fort, situated on top of the cliffs just outside the port of Le Palais. German army units were installed in the fort, and I thought at the time that these fortifications must have been in existence since the days of the French Revolution, how right I was. Since those days as a matter of interest I looked up the history of Belle Ile, Brittany's largest island, although only twenty kilometres long, and twelve kilometres wide, it apparently had a really turbulent history going back hundreds of years. It appears that the Bastille type fort in which I was imprisoned was, and still is known as The Citadel, and along with the ramparts, and redoubts was actually built on the orders of Louis 14th of France by a gentleman named Vauban, who was one of the greatest military engineers of his time.

I can certainly believe that as the cell, in the dark depths of the Citadel, in which I was placed was certainly reminiscent of that era. The room was very narrow being about two yards wide but it was very high with a small iron barred window situated about ten feet above the stone floor. A wooden bench covered with straw was my bed, in all not exactly the Strand Palace, its a bloody good job I still had my thick Irvin flying jacket to keep me warm during the cold nights. A young German soldier ushered me inside the cell, the heavy door was slammed, and then locked, it was the night of the 1st March, 1943 my term of Kriegsgefangenschaft had commenced in earnest, albeit in a temporary abode. As I laid on my back

resting on the straw covered bench my thoughts were once again centred on Bill, and the rest of the crew who had seemingly gone down with our kite. With my eyes focussed on the ceiling I relived these very swift happenings of that unfortunate period which occurred immediately after we had bombed St. Nazaire.

I again considered the issues, could we have done anything different? , but it was no good thinking of what might have been, the entire episode was now all over, and part of the past. Eventually, the merry go round inside my sore, and weary mind slowed down considerably which enabled me to drift off into a deep sleep, it had been a long and hectic thirty six hours since the raid preparations of the morning of the 28th February.

My first morning in captivity duly arrived, the German guard who brought in my food turned out to be a pleasant young soldier who could speak some English. He informed me that he came from Hamburg so I did not acquaint him with the fact

that I had taken part in bombing his home town on five occasions. This young man became my regular jailer bringing in my rations twice per day, he soon became very talkative especially about the game of soccer, apparently he was a keen fan who

formerly played as a goalkeeper in a local Hamburg team. So we had something in common, a mutual liking for the game of football. The young Wehrmacht private was entirely familiar with our professional football scene, and during one of his twice daily visits disclosed to me that his favourite team had been Arsenal. DURING THE FIRST week of cell confinement I was getting slightly brownd off with pacing the confines of my smallish room, throughout periods of the day, for some exercise .

I could just about reach the high barred window which overlooked a quadrangle, but alas there was not hing to see. To circumvent the boredom I took the chance of discussing the situation with the young guard, after all, nothing ventured nothing gained. I therefore asked him if he could obtain permission for me to be allowed a portion of fresh air, and some exercise. The youthful German private soldier heard me out, and agreed to see his superior officer on my behalf. I must say I was very surprised when my request was granted, and in consequence I was allowed out on to the battlements in order to stretch my legs. This session took place once per day during the afternoon period when I enjoyed a walk around the ramparts accompanied, of course, by the inevitable armed guard.

During the following afternoon whilst happily engrossed in my walk around, and at the same time breathing in the fresh salty sea air I was suddenly confronted by a German officer who calmly produced a camera, and proceeded to take my photograph. I'll wager he showed that snapshot to all his mates, and girl friends, no doubt it was supported by some sort of tall story. I must have looked a real desperado, scruffy to say the least, with dishevelled locks, a two weeks growth of red beard, clad in a crumpled battle dress uniform I was minus a collar and tie which had been substituted with a thick blue scarf knotted around my neck. Dirty, muddy flying boots completed the picture, in all a travesty of a once smart airman, but who cared, I certainly did not.

In my mind's eye I could imagine this Wehrmacht officer showing the snap around

willy-nilly, and at the same time expressing the opinion that this is how a typical RAF "terrorflieger" really looked at close quarters.

Nostalgically, I wish I had that photograph in my possession right now.

The monotonous hours and days of solitary confinement passed very slowly into weeks,

I had all the time in the world, but very little or nothing to do with it, the diversions were very few nevertheless I did not allow the situation to get me down. During this unpleasant existence my environment was only enlivened by the eagerly anticipated afternoon jaunts in the fresh air, short and sweet though they were. By the end of the third week, deep inside the "Bastille" of Belle Isle, I was looking really scruffy with an ever irritating growth of red beard, and melodramatically I had visions of ending up like the renowned "Count of Monte Christo", a prolonged incarceration, and a long beard to go with it. However this fantasy of mine was not to be, for one morning quite unexpectedly, the cell door was opened with a flourish by an armed guard I did not recognise, who bawled out in typical Teutonic tones "Raus" Raus", "Aufstehen". He seemed to be in a hell of a hurry as he impatiently and forcefully bundled me outside into the stone passage. As I stood there wearing a surprised look he gave me a swift hard dig in the small of my back with his rifle butt, and propelled me up several flights of stairs until we emerged into what was obviously the garrison orderly room. All eyes looked up, and at one of the tables papers were being signed, I noticed that one of the Germans involved was wearing a familiar grey-blue uniform. I realised then that I was in the process of being officially transferred over to the Luftwaffe, it was time to bid farewell to Belle Isle. Two of their representatives had arrived to escort me to the French mainland, and thence to Germany, the ultimate objective being the Luftwaffe transit, and interrogation centre, Dulag Luft, Oberursel which was situated just outside Frankfurt - Am-Main.

The senior of my two Luftwaffe escorts was a dapper, stockily built Oberfeldwebel (a rank roughly equivalent to my RAF rank of Flight Sergeant.) who was equipped with a side arm. His accomplice, a humble Gefrieter or "erk", was armed with a rifle. I felt like a second hand item on sale as I stood witnessing the completion of the formalities. One very relieved, but slightly worn, and dishevelled looking RAF F/Sgt Wop/Ag had been handed over, a signature had been obtained from the Oberfeldwebel to finalise the proceedings. From their facial expressions both parties seemed happy with the outcome, the Wehrmacht were no doubt pleased to see the back of me. Both Luftwaffe escorts, and prisoner headed out of The Citadel to make our way to the quayside, only a short distance was involved, to board the already heavily laden ferry boat. From here on in the tall Gefrieter with the rifle never left my side, he was like a bloody shadow. I had noticed on leaving the building that the Oberfeldwebel was carrying a sack which I promptly presumed contained items salvaged from our crashed Wimpey.

I cannot say I enjoyed crossing the Bay of Biscay which certainly lived up to its rough reputation, and being stationed on the crowded upper deck the combined effect of the lashing spray, and the up, down motion of the boat made it an invigorating experience to say the least.

The turbulent sea crossing was accomplished in about sixty five minutes when the ferry boat then docked at Quiberon, which is situated on the southern tip of a narrow peninsular, and was the nearest point on the French mainland to the scene of our departure, Belle Isle. Luckily we did not hit any of our mines, the immediate off shore areas of this French coastline were popular haunts for minelaying crews of Bomber Command. After disembarking from the ferry at Quiberon my armed escorts then took me by car along the peninsular coast road, and sitting between them in the back seat I concentrated on viewing the local scenery, and checked the signposts while noting that the whole of this particular area seemed to be well endowed with concrete flak towers. After we had travelled about twenty kilometres I noticed the word Vannes displayed on several signposts, and this town ultimately proved to be our next port of call. From my window view Vannes looked to be a busy town, indeed it seemed to be a hive of activity, but I was not to see much of it, for me it was to be only a temporary stop.



I had not anticipated a stop so soon after leaving Belle Ile, and surprisingly wondered what the bloody hell the Krauts were playing at, I was soon to find out. The driver came to a halt outside a dark, grim looking building which turned out to be a real prison, iron bars and all. I was bundled unceremoniously out of the car by my escorts, and transferred to the care of a couple of prison guards who took me inside, and without speaking a word locked me up in one of their cells. I was once again on my lonesome in a cell which had three brick walls, and a totally iron barred front door. I was thrown in at the deep end this time, no blanket or straw to lay on, just a wooden offering for a bed, it was bloody hard consequently I never had much sleep. I spent a day and a half in this establishment, which I assumed was a military prison simply because during the daylight hours the inmate of the next cell tried to converse with me, it transpired he was a German Army deserter, what was to be his fate does not bear contemplating, but he had my sympathy.

My two Luftwaffe escorts returned the next day to pick me up, and once again we were on the move, a long train journey this time across France to its capital city, Paris. We shared a compartment on our own, and the big Gefreiter decided it was time to eat, I was included in the deal, and gratefully received a hunk of black bread with some German sausage to go with it. Afterwards I was given a cigarette to smoke, it was really bloody awful, a real coughing nail, but I stuck it out to the last half inch. The Luftwaffe Gefreiter wasn't such a bad bloke at all, but the stocky Oberfeldwebel ignored me completely throughout the whole of the train journey to Paris.

Finally arriving at the French metropolis we alighted at one of its main stations, it was similar to St. Pancras tee ming with people dashing all over the place, including both French civvies, and German servicemen.

It was evident we would be changing trains here, and the next one would be bound for the Reich, meanwhile my "shadow" the Gefreiter gave me a couple of reminders with his rifle butt, and motioned me towards the station Services canteen. As we passed through the entrance door heads were turned in our direction, and I was the subject of various inquisitive glances, with many a searching look from some of the occupants.

Visibly unmoved I sat down at a table with my two escorts, and thoroughly enjoyed the bowl of soup, and the cup of coffee which was provided by my Luftwaffe entourage, but I was still bloody hungry, and it looked as if I would remain so. The Paris station services canteen was full to capacity with jostling German servicemen of all categories who were jawing away excitedly in Deutsch, and more than one approached my watchdogs to engage them in conversation, obviously curious to know my circumstances. At this very early stage of my P.O.W. existence I did not understand the German lingo so I was not aware of the story the Oberfeldwebel was putting across to his obviously interested comrades in arms, but I could read their facial expressions. Long after the interest in my presence had waned the Oberfeldwebel glanced at his watch, and made known it was time to make a move. The lowly Gefreiter gave me a prod with his rifle, and gesticulated the general direction I should take.

With one on either side of me I had not much chance of making a break even though the several platforms over which we crossed were crowded with large numbers of people hurrying in all directions.

We boarded the Frankfurt train, our ultimate destination being Dulag Luft, at Oberursel and found we were sharing a compartment with several Italian U Boat sailors, who I deduced were returning overland to Italy, probably for a spot of leave.

These Italian sailors could have travelled from the same area as we three, that is either St. Nazaire or Lorient U Boat bases. Free from the pressures of their underwater existence they seemed a cheerful lot, and in a similar fashion to the other German servicemen also proved inquisitive about my presence.

I had been adroitly placed in the corner seat of the compartment near the window a position that was well away from the door to the corridor. Throughout the long rail journey my two escorts were very vigilant, but at the same time did not say very much. For some time I had ceased to be interested in my window view of the rapidly changing countryside. After a few hours had elapsed the Luftwaffe Gefreiter, with his rifle between his knees, relented at long last to break the silence, and offer me a cigarette. It was of a similar type to the one received earlier with its rank, pungent odour it tasted like dried camel dung, but in my situation beggars could not be choosers.

The senior of my two escorts, the dapper Oberfeldwebel remained aloof to maintain his silent vigil as he too sat smoking. The quiet solitude was O.K. by me I had no wish to converse, although I was still unaware if either of them understood English. Nevertheless, I would have liked to know the contents of the sack the Oberfeldwebel so carefully guarded. It was odds on that this large bag contained something taken from our crashed Wimpey, but what?

It was pitch dark when our asserted trio arrived at Frankfurt-am-Main railway station and no doubt the locals who were milling around the station were now all too familiar at the sight of the odd RAF aircrew prisoners disembarking before undertaking the short onward journey to nearby Oberursel, and the notorious Dulag Luft.

The name Dulag Luft was of course a shortened version of its proper title, which was Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe (Air Force Transit Camp).

I can recall boarding a tram to cover the few miles from Frankfurt, and after alighting, walking a short distance to the Transit camp. Despite the darkness I could make out what appeared to be a group of single storey huts or buildings which were surrounded by fairly high barbed wire, we had arrived.

The Oberfeldwebel did all the talking at the gate, an armed guard admitted our party to lead us into an office where I was duly handed over, the Oberfeldwebel's stint was now at its end, no doubt he received a signature to finalise the deal.

I was now in for another spell of solitary confinement but this was an Interrogation centre, therefore the conditions would be more severe. To date I had no grumbles concerning my treatment, although food had been strictly on the meagre side

I had not been on the receiving end of any rough stuff.

Following the handing over preliminaries, now firmly ensconced inside Dulag Luft, I found myself hurriedly escorted along various passages to finally enter a corridor which had a row of doors on either side. The Dulag guard scrutinised his large key ring to open one of the doors, and lead me inside.

The room was about nine feet by six feet, and contained a bed of sorts with a straw palliase, a chair plus a small table occupied the remainder of the room. The far wall had a window which was protected by iron bars on the outside. My jailer then told me to take off my battle dress uniform, boots etc, and in lieu I was given an old Polish khaki coloured uniform of sorts, and a pair of clogs. Standing in the centre of the small room looking like a bloody caricature my strong verbal protests were ignored as the guard calmly informed me that my uniform, Irvin jacket etc would be returned the following day, my garments were obviously to be the subject of a search. This act was only the first of a series of intimidatory processes designed to keep the morale at rock bottom for obvious reasons. I hoped the "Jerry" who had the job of searching my belongings was adversely affected by "B.O.", the uniform, flying boots etc. had not been off my person for almost a month. The guard placed all my gear in the outside corridor before he slammed the door, and turned the key. Once again I was on my "Jack Jones", a situation which did not worry me one iota. After almost a month of hermit like existence since being shot down I was more or less accustomed to the routine of solitary confinement. I gave a momentary glance around the bare room, and with a shrug decided there was nothing else to do except climb on the rickety bed, and get some shut-eye.

The cells were numbered, and a device was attached to the outside of the door in order to attract the attention of the guard, but the system did not always work, whether by accident or design, especially when the call of nature was apparent.

It was the guard's job to escort one to the latrine consequently the signal was often ignored much to our discomfort. Outside each cell door was a switch which controlled the heating in each cell which was manipulated by the guards in the battle of nerves between them and us. The Germans would purposely control this switch alternately between extreme heat, and cold which was all part of the softening up process to keep our spirits at a low ebb after the initial shock of being shot down, and being made a prisoner. The guards controlled the electric light too, invariably it was switched on during the day, and off at night, but I cannot say this manoeuvre made any difference to me or any other prisoner there being nothing else to do but rest, sleep and think. I simply laid on my back on the bed covered myself with the two thin blankets, and usually dozed off. The following morning I was awakened by the noise, and entry of one of the guards who placed a mug, and a couple of thin slices of black bread on the table to then depart. The mug contained a hot brew of ersatz coffee, made from acorns. I had now been on an austere diet for almost a month, and having little to eat or drink throughout my long journey from the French coast I lingered on the wet, warm beverage. The hours passed very slowly until about midday the same Kraut brought in a bowl of swede soup, which was mainly hot water with several cube shaped pieces of swede floating about. The soup was supplemented by four or five rough looking spuds cooked in their own skins, big deal, this was the main dish of the day. The soup varied at odd times during the days I spent in this block, sometimes it was Sauerkraut, or a thick white concoction we called "weed" soup, another German "ersatz" triumph.

Some time later during the afternoon the first member of the interrogation team paid me a visit, and very politely, using faultless English, asked me to fill in a form he had already placed on the table. It was supposed to be an International Red Cross form, indeed it was suitably engraved as such at the top of the form, with the Red Cross emblem. They were several questions in the lower part of the form that obviously had nothing at all to do with the Red Cross organisation. I filled in my name, rank, and number plus my parents home address to ignore the rest, and finally gave him back the form. He was not satisfied with my efforts, and implied that in being uncooperative I would remain a long time in solitary confinement, and therefore would not join my comrades in the main camp across the road. I did not utter one word in reply I just stood there and gave him a dead pan look before he left the cell, and the cat and mouse game went on. The following day a different bod took over, he was similarly smartly attired in a grey-blue uniform, and also spoke English without a trace of any accent. He did not repeat the Red Cross form "con", but instead asked me point blank what secret equipment our aircraft had been carrying. I did not ponder, but just as bluntly replied "What secret equipment", and pleaded ignorance. In a matter of fact fashion this debonair Sonderfuhrer then shrugged his shoulders, and remarked that it did not matter whether I told him or not because he could always get the information from Berlin. I immediately suggested that what he would have to do because I was not saying anything at all. In actual fact as far as I was aware there had been no secret equipment aboard our Wimpey anyway.

The Sonderführer did not ask me any further questions, but instead insisted I should accompany him to another room, whereupon my thoughts immediately centred on the sack which had travelled with me all the way from Belle Isle, the scene of my capture. He then took me out of my cell, and escorted me down a further corridor where we entered a large room in which were amalgamated all sorts of equipment salvaged from shot down bombers. Fixed to the wall adjacent to where I was standing I could not help noticing one of our I.F.F. (Identification Friend or Foe) sets. At that stage of the war there was nothing new about that item it had been in use about two years, the Germans must have got their hands on quite a few of those sets during that time. I cannot recall what exactly he wanted me to see, whether it was the sack of probable salvaged items the Oberfeldwebel had in his possession all the way from our demise, I cannot say for after forty odd years I have no clear recollection of that particular episode in the room except what-

-ever it was I certainly only looked, and said nothing.

As an old hand I think it is fair to say that factually the German Air Force intelligence was probably on a par with ours, and just as we were aware of their squadron locations and identification letters, beacon frequencies, colours of the day etc it was likely that they knew our equivalent. In certain instances the enemy were in possession of details concerning some of our squadron commanders, other individuals, and in some cases the names of local pubs used, some of which information they could have obtained from our newspapers.

Information of the type mentioned was used psychologically at the correct moment during interrogations of some newly shot down aircrew lads to put them off balance, a sort of sucker punch with a quick question usually following. Much later on in the permanent P.C.W. camp at Iamsdorf I heard various stories concerning the Dulag Luft interrogation block, one of which inferred that the odd Kriegie was taken out for a drink at the local hostelry in the nearby woods for obvious reasons. I never knew whether those yarns were true or not, however I do know that a great many tall stories were told in our compound, and many were not authentic being mainly in the "lineshooting" category.

Nevertheless it was a fact that the Luftwaffe interrogators with their faultless English were obviously very well trained in their art, and their act was always accompanied by the inevitable packet of "Players" cigarettes. When they entered the cell it was always the velvet glove approach initially, and then the threats which in most cases proved meaningless.

After four days of solitary confinement in the interrogation block at Dulag with its starvation diet, the cat and mouse play, and the "On" "Off" heating process game my cell door was again opened "Kommen Sie Mit" "Schnell" Schnell" shouted the guard, bugger him I thought, I'll take my own sweet time as I slowly donned my Irvin jacket to saunter out, was it another bloody interrogation? The guard escorted me down the corridor, and a few yards further on I was very surprised to find I was on my way out heading for the main camp. It was goodbye to the Interrogation block as we wended our way down a path to enter the gate of the adjoining main camp where the familiar RAF blue was now much in evidence.

After the long tedious hours and weeks of my own company here at last I had some mates to talk to, I had received my own battle dress uniform, Irvin jacket, boots etc back from the Germans a couple of days previously. Their search of my gear was a waste of time, but they purloined an official Womens Land Army badge I had pinned to my Irvin jacket, a lucky charm from my girl friend.

Entering the main camp at Dulag Luft I still presented a scruffy sight, unkempt, dirty boots, and wearing a now four weeks old stubbly red beard. Such a spectacle presented on the home front would have given the average Station Warrant Officer a nervous breakdown. Although the Germans were in the driving seat, the small main camp at Dulag was run by a staff of our own RAF bods some of whom had been in residence there for quite some time.