

I was welcomed by the senior man, and given a few necessary items sent by the Red Cross organisation. With the help of these I made myself look a bit more presentable, and the shave was a real pleasure even if the blade was not all that keen. I really made it last, and the wash too I had not realised I was so grimy, and dirty, but when I had finished my ablutions I looked a different fellow. The RAF kriegie permanent staff looked after us new boys very well. Accordingly as new arrivals filtered through the Interrogation block, and came into the main camp corresponding numbers of Red Cross food parcels were issued from which the cookhouse along with the frugal German rations provided communal feeding with various menus amalgamated from both sources. The bulk of course being from the food parcels with the German share being only a few spuds per person, and a soup ration which was thickened up by adding ingredients from the Red Cross, tinned meat etc. Additionally from the Germans we had a small daily ration of black bread in the afternoons. After a lean time during my previous initial three weeks of captivity I was comparatively well fed in the short time I spent in the transit camp at Dulag Luft. A small football field was situated alongside the barrack huts which was used mainly for exercise purposes. After enduring three weeks of isolation I spent a fair bit of the daylight hours delighting in the fresh air, and obtained plenty of exercise whilst negotiating quite a few circuits of the small field. A rare delicacy, partaken now was the daily cuppa of genuine tea, the real McCoy, the first few cups tasted like nectar, and afterwards a few drags on a English cigarette, pure tranquility. Naturally when we sprog Kriegies got together in the main camp a lot of nattering was inevitable, with the main subject being what happened on the ill fated night we each got the chop. Bomber Command's battle of the Ruhr had commenced by ~~then~~, and newly shot down aircrew lads kept coming in from the solitary Block at regular intervals, some still a bit shaken by their experiences, and now much relieved to be once again in the company of their fellow aircrew contemporaries. After a few days the Germans held a roll call when sufficient numbers had now amalgamated to warrant a despatch to a permanent prison camp. We were travelling light having nothing to pack, the few items I had been given by the camp staff were stashed inside what pockets I had in my battle dress uniform, and these now included a few English cigarettes. Several of the lads on the staff wished us all the best, it was just routine for them, new P.O.W.'s kept coming and going, it was something they had got used to. We were lined up, the roll was called, a few orders were barked as finally, flanked by guards we marched out of Dulag Luft off to the rail terminus. I cannot recall many of the details of the long and tedious rail journey except that we were installed in old wooden carriages with hard seats, nothing but the best for us, and we ultimately became part of a slow goods train. I cannot recall exactly how many beds we were in our party but I somehow think it was around the sixty mark, and though we were aware that a great distance was involved, little did we envisage what a tough camp we would be incarcerated in.

The journey proved to be a long slow haul, and many sidings were encountered en route where sometimes we remained immobile for very long intervals of time, no doubt waiting to be attached to other goods trains scheduled to travel in our general direction. As the hours, and days slowly passed by, the wooden seats did not get appreciably softer, but on the other hand we could think ourselves very lucky indeed to be occupying even such obsolete rail carriages. The usual rail conveyance, by courtesy of the Third Reich, for P.O.W.'s on long journeys was the kriegie "pullman", the covered horse trucks, which were all captured French rolling stock. On the outside of these, inscribed on a metal plate, was the legend which meant in English "8 HORSES OR 40 MEN". Inside these black holes no seating was available, and neither lighting or sanitary arrangements, prisoners were packed in like sardines with the sliding doors locked behind them. In the dark, and airless atmosphere of these cattle trucks amidst the overpowering smell of excreta the unfortunate occupants had to suffer a truly claustrophobic experience, indeed we could count ourselves as being very fortunate, our journey, and mode of travel had been organised by the Luftwaffe.

Before embarking on our journey we had been given rations for three days by our captors which consisted of German sausage meat, and black bread. I did not mind the bread, in time I really acquired a taste for it, this bread possessed a flavour of its own. Much later on inside the main P.O.W. camp I found out that it was especially tasty when fried. The provision of hot liquid refreshment was very rare indeed during the onward course of our journey, but we managed to obtain a ration of water, or luckily a portion of hot ersatz coffee at the various sidings at which we stopped as well as relieving the call of nature.

The extremely long and tedious journey to the far eastern part of Greater Germany, as it was then termed, took the greater part of four days to achieve, and we subsequently disembarked at a small railway station which was only a few miles from our new "five star" accommodation to give its full title M. STAMMLAGER 8B, LAMSDORF, UPPER SILESIA. All this area, of course, is now part of Poland, and all the place names in the locality have been changed since the War ended. Having now reached the end of the line the Germans really came into their own as the many guards ran here, and there shouting and bellowing "Raus" Raus" "Mach Schnell" as they bundled us unceremoniously out of the two rail carriages with a back up of busy rifle butts. Stiff limbs were quickly galvanised into action as the mixture of bewildered, and indignant sprog RAF kriegies were roughly formed up into some sort of order, when our numbers were checked. I would realise later on in Kriegsgefangenschaft that the Germans had quite an obsession in respect of counting, and recounting bodies. On this occasion they must have been quite satisfied with their efforts as no recount was taken, and after a period of further shouting, and gesticulating our party shambled off towards Lamsdorf. Stalag 8 B was apparently on the site of a World War 1 camp, and in this second catastrophe was reputed to be the largest, and also one of the worst P.O.W. camps in the Reich.

A mile or two further on the high barbed wire complex came into view, orders were then bawled out right, left, and centre as our contingent of raw P.O.W.'s slowly came to a halt on a large expanse of open ground just outside the Stalag.

While we stood, and visually took in the sombre scene, no spark of interest lit up our eyes as we stared mutely at the high double barbed wire fences, and the adroitly placed gun towers of this very large prison camp. Its appearance presented a grim looking spectacle, and without a doubt everyone in our party was wondering at that precise moment what the conditions would be like inside the wire, we would soon be finding out. Our few moments of meditation were soon over, loud teutonic voices were once more in action as the Germans proceeded to give each, and every one of us a thorough search. That was fair enough, but then came the crunch, when all our flying clothing we were wearing was forcibly taken from our persons. Indignation was rife, and the air was blue with the utterance of a host of varied colourful expletives, many

of them again suggesting that the Krauts involved did

~~did~~ not have legal parentage. In my case a fur lined Irvin jacket, and my black leather flying boots were purloined, no doubt all these warm aircrew issue items would be sent henceforth to the Russian Front to be worn by some of the poor bloody half frozen German infantry types. What sheer effrontery, but "Jerry" was in the driving seat, on the face of it they could do anything they liked with us. In lieu of my precious flying boots I, and all the other lads in similiar circumstances, were given a pair of wooden clogs to wear, not a very good deal as far as we were concerned.

During the general pandemonium the Germans successfully accomplished their saucy flying kit robbery well within the hour, we could only offer vocal opposition before we were prodded on the move towards the main gate of the Stalag. I could not walk properly wearing these bloody clogs, instead it was more of a slow shuffle with the remainder of the lads experiencing the same trouble. In all it was a farcical situation, but we were not laughing that's for sure, maybe the Germans thought it was funny, but there again they did not possess much of a sense of humour.

Making our way with great difficulty, most kept losing the odd clog, we slowly moved through the portals of Stalag 8 B, Lamsdorf. This infamous establishment was predominantly an Army P.O.W. camp under the control of the Wehrmacht (German Army), not the Luftwaffe, so we R.A.F. lads collectively had the same train of thought, bugger our luck, we were due for a rough passage. The compound situated just inside the outer main gate of the camp was the German Administration block, the Vorlager, which housed the Kommandants office, Guard room, and all the other various offices. The second inner gate was the main P.O.W. camp gate through which our "sprog" RAF kriegie contingent was now passing.

It was soon evident that news passes very quickly in Gefangenschaft as a great crowd consisting of both Army and RAF kriegies had speedily congregated near this ~~entrance~~ emitting a chorus of cheerful greetings as they welcomed the new boys. In the general confusion, the constant babble of voices, it was quite a job singling out the individuals for they all required to know the latest "gen" concerning the home front, and the current war situation. The kriegie "old sweats" wearing our RAF blue shouted out the inevitable question "What squadron were you on, mate" to various individuals of our party. At the same time many of them, with necks craned, were casting sharp eyed glances at each of our faces hoping against the odds that might spot someone they knew from either squadron, O.T.U. or earlier training days. One such member of this welcome to Lamsdorf crowd gave me a loud shout to then push his way to the front of the milling throng.

I instantly recognised a familiar face, that of an Australian navigator who had been a Sergeant trainee at No. 14 O.T.U. RAF Cottesmore during my period at that station as a "screened" instructor. During the late spring of the previous year he had flown with me as a member of a scratch crew on the first two 1000 bomber raids, Cologne and Essen. I cannot recall this very pleasant Aussie's name, but I think he was shot down early in his squadron career. His first words to me when we met face to face were "I did not think you would end up here", I laughed, and remarked that formerly I had possessed that same train of thought, but here I was in a prison camp, and bloody lucky to be so, too.

He must have thought I had been immortal, knowing I had survived a previous tour of Ops, none were immortal at that wartime game we indulged in. That contingent of aircrew kriegies of which I was part proved to be the last lot sent to this particular Stalag, so even as a P.O.W., quizzically, I was maintaining my late run of "duff" postings. In the ordinary course of events we should have been sent to a Luft camp run by the Luftwaffe, but apparently these Stalag Luft camps were very few, and full up.

At that period of the war the only other Army Stalag which contained an RAF compound was Stalag 4 B, Muhlberg, Saxony ~~which was~~ some hundreds of kilometres further west from our location.

Subsequently most of the shot down NCO aircrew, as the weight, and numbers of Bomber Command attacks intensified, would find themselves sent to newly constructed Stalag Luft camps. The first of these was Stalag Luft 6 which was situated at Heydekrug. This camp at the far eastern end of the Baltic was positioned more or less on the borders of what was once known as East Prussia, and Lithuania, and would accommodate both RAF and USAAF NCO aircrew prisoners of war. Later on Stalag Luft 7, Bankau came into being, this camp was situated somewhere near the town of Kreuzberg, which was positioned east of Breslau, and therefore on the eastern side of the River Oder. Both of these Air Force camps were much more enlightened places of abode than the miserable looking dump in which I was now incarcerated. Since then it has been said that to have been a RAF kriegie inside rough, tough Lamsdorf achieved a certain notoriety, a dubious honour I would say.

As new arrivals we were herded into a small compound, located just inside the main camp gates, for reception purposes. Our kriegie welcome committee had now thinned somewhat, but a throng of RAF types maintained their vigil to continue spasmodic conversations through the barbed wire. The RAF Compound Leader apparently had everything under control because we eventually received a Red Cross food parcel one to be shared between two of us. Following our wearisome three day plus train journey on starvation rations we certainly made a big hole in the contents of this very welcome parcel. One combine of two swiftly opened all their tins, and commenced to amalgamate the total contents into one dixie, a real mixed grill, but what a horrible mixture nevertheless these two hungry airmen scoffed the lot at one go, no trouble at all. My partner and I adopted a more civilised approach, and shared one commodity at a time while saving something for later on. Of course the main point was how long was the parcel supposed to last, being new at the game we obviously did not know, though we would learn very quickly. During the short period we spent as members of the "welcome to Lamsdorf" barrack hut all our sprog intake were processed, if that is the correct word, inasmuch as we were individually photographed, these were real mug shots, finger printed, recorded, and finally numbered.

103A

As an unwilling guest of the Third Reich I was now tagged as Kriegsgefangener number 27628, which was marked in duplicate on a rectangular metal disc to be henceforth ^{hung} around my neck along with my RAF service identity discs. The explanation for the duplication of the P.O.W. numerical particulars was simply that if one died in captivity the perforated disc would be conveniently broken, one half being buried with one's body, the remaining half would then be sent to the Swiss protecting power.

With the completion of our initiation ceremony we were now part of the Lamsdorf establishment, every RAF kriegie in our intake now had his own place in the German Vorlager files. This meant that our short sojourn in the reception barrack was at an end. In the general air of confusion that followed we were shepherded outside, roughly formed up into some order to be marched up one of the camp roads which was flanked by various barbed wire compounds.

Stalag 8 B was literally a barbed wire city by virtue of its large population, and its many compounds. At a glance, as we headed towards the RAF compound, it was impossible to ascertain the exact size of the camp. Large poles lined the various camp roads, and affixed to them were electric lights, also loud speakers. Propaganda blared out continuously throughout the day via the loudspeakers alternating with German martial music. Following a turn to the right our group of sprog kriegies approached the next compound on our left, where I could now see the familiar blue of the RAF battledress uniform. Many of our brethren were lining the wire to welcome us into our new abode. Variety was the spice of life, so seeing a group of new faces was obviously a welcome change to their usual monotonous POW routine, and soon everybody belonging to our reception committee was intently trying to recognise a face. When unsuccessful they seemed to be asking the obvious alternative questions, such as "What squadron, mate", "whats the latest Gen", or "Did you know so and so", and so the comradely cross-examination continued. The different questions were numerous, but we would have plenty of time to answer them all in conclusive fashion, after all nobody was going any place for some considerable time.

Stalag 8 B Lamsdorf accomodated roughly about fifteen thousand P.O.W.'s who were predominantly Army types, the majority of whom were captured in France during the year of 1940. Although the Stalag had a large permanent POW population its main function was its use as a transit camp for Army POW working parties (Arbeitskommandos) which were formed, and sent out from here to all parts of Silesia taking in both agricultural, and industrial areas. This system did not affect we RAF aircrew kriegies. I was a Flight Sergeant at the time, but we were all senior N.C.O.'s, and as such ineligible for work under the terms of the Geneva Convention, only private soldiers were obliged to work.

If we aircrew bods had been sent out to work sabotage, and escape attempts would have been rife, there was no doubt about that, and certainly the Germans were aware of this too. We were soon to learn in term of fact that the RAF compound was a sort of prison within a prison, veritabily an island, inasmuch as the camp was administered by the German Army, which meant that our compound suffered harsher discipline, and at that time all the RAF occupants were forced to wear chains or manacles during the daylight hours. I will expand on this in a later chapter.

I can relate that it was a constant battle of wits between them, and us, and it goes without saying that we were uncooperative, and certainly bloody minded. We in the RAF compound were always making things as difficult as possible for the Germans, and morning roll calls were no exception in this respect, so disciplinary measures were always in operation against we lads in blue which meant that at frequent intervals our compound was locked up with our entire complement penned in for varying periods of time. Due to the pounding the German cities were receiving, and which was ever increasing, from the crews of Bomber Command there was no love lost between our captors and the occupants of the RAF compound at Lamsdorf. They hated our guts, but at the same time I think they respected our never say die spirit. Never at any time did the Deutchers get us down, and in fact the RAF contingent at Lamsdorf caused the German authorities a great deal of trouble, and confusion with the "Swop Over" routine for escape purposes during 1942, and the following two years, which is fully explained later on in this narrative.

EACH BLOCK

The entire P.O.W. population of Lamsdorf was located within ten blocks or compounds, each compound being enclosed within high barbed wire fences. Departure and entry FROM was effected through a large lockable gate which was fastened nightly after lights out. The whole camp was surrounded by a double barbed wire fence fifteen feet high, with the four feet wide space between filled to a height of five or six feet with circular rolls of additional barbed wire, an unsurmountable obstacle. Tall guard towers were positioned at each corner of the outer double fence, and these were equipped with searchlights and machine guns. Situated just inside the outer fence of the camp along its entirety was the "trip" wire, this was a single length of barbed wire positioned about eighteen inches above the ground level. To venture over, and across this length of wire was to risk life and limb as the guards manning the towers had strict orders to shoot any kriegie who was foolhardy enough to stride over this single strand of wire, the implication was obvious.

In common with most other blocks, the RAF compound was composed of four long single storey barrack huts with a smaller building standing in solitary state on the far side of the compound, adjacent to the parade ground. This insignificant smaller building, which must have been constructed from a combination of mud, straw, plaster and wood, was the notorious "40" Holer, the compound communal latrine. Our single storey barrack huts were very long in length, and these buildings actually contained two barracks, lettered A and B, which were separated in the centre by a wash house used by both barracks. This wash house, which consisted of two sets of four highly placed cold water taps spaced over long crude stone troughs, was the scene of our daily ablutions. Necessarily it was also the place where we "dhoibied" our shirts, and all the other items. Although the taps were fitted in such an awkward position a cold shower of sorts was possible, that is if one was a medium sized contortionist, but inevitably there was always a snag. The Germans did not cooperate, and during the summer months cold water was rarely available at the taps during normal daylight hours except at the very early morning time of five or six am. Obviously, RAF kriegies being what they were, very, very few took advantage of this awkwardly timed facility, except for a handful of the really keen types. Of course when the temperature nosedived during the Autumn, and Winter periods they were no takers at all.

The total number of barracks in the RAF compound was eight, and these were numbered as follows: -15 A and B, 16 A and B, 17 A and B, and 18 A and B. which in all housed a total of approximately twelve hundred RAF beds, including our group of new arrivals. Our contingent of new boys were ultimately shared out on a more or less equal basis between the eight barracks, myself and several others being allocated to barrack hut 16 A, which would be my hall of residence until the end.

The barrack commander, a moustached Sgt pilot, who by virtue of his responsibilities was entitled to some privacy, was quartered in a makeshift room at the top end of the barrack. He was on hand to meet us, and mindful of the circumstances, welcomed our small group as members of his flock. After introducing himself we had a little talk which concluded after he had given us a general idea of what went on during the normal daily routine of P.O.W. camp procedure, we absorbed the information well.

After our initiation by the barrack commander to the ways of Kriegsgefangenschaft we "sprogs" were allocated to various tables for ration purposes, and simultaneously each found himself a bed space. I managed to find obtain a top berth, adjacent to the open space of the barrack, which suited me admirably. Its position was not so claustrophobic as in the middle of the tier. It provided me with an unhindered view of the line of tables, and their occupants. In other words I was in the swing of things being able to see, and hear all that was happening so was able to join in by way of conversation. I soon became adept at climbing up to my top perch, and the ever present swaying motion did not disturb me. Always a quick learner I adroitly placed my five movable bed boards expertly to minimise the risk of my body sagging where it should not at all costs I did not fancy falling through on to the poor old kriegie & reposing in the bed position below me, this could and did happen to others. Very early on during my P.O.W existence I learned to look after my bedboards, precious items these, as various wide boys thought nothing of "lifting" the odd bed board or two if they thought the coast was clear. Of course they would then be used as fuel for cooking purposes, yes as far as my bed boards were concerned I was & definitely one hawk eyed kriegie.

When I first set foot inside barrack 16 A I really did not know what to expect but after a cursory glance around I immediately thought "Bloody hell, what a rough looking dump, a real black hole this is", and I was soon to discover that almost one hundred and fifty RAF beds shared the one room, which was the barrack hut.

The windows along the right hand side of the hut were practically non-existent with little or no glass left in them, pieces of sacking and plywood being used in lieu. The composition of the walls with holes gouged out here and there looked to be a combination of lathes, straw and mud. In common with the other barracks in the compound hut 16 A was about thirty yards long, and either ten or twelve yards wide, being single storey with a flat roof. The ceiling was only a matter of eighteen inches to two feet above the level of the top bunk, so this occupant had to be very careful when sitting up or else the result would be a headache, yes it happened to me during the early stages. One half of the entire interior space of the barrack, which was in fact the

whole of the left hand side, was occupied by a tightly packed two tier bunks system for sleeping accommodation. Space in the hut was at a premium, and these shaky wooden structures were grouped in blocks with only narrow gangways between. Each bunk had a straw filled palliase placed over five or six wooden bed boards.

The middle bunk was situated some three feet above ground level with the top position being a further three feet above. Life in the top bunk was arguably a sight more tolerable than the one below, there being no danger of anyone falling through the spaced bed boards on top of you.

After a short space of time one would tend to ignore the sway of the wooden framework but on the other hand a distinct advantage was the availability of ample light.

A top bunk occupier, nevertheless had to be very careful during his climb up to reach his lofty perch. Logically, he had to avoid soiling blankets etc belonging to his middle bunk colleague, especially during wet, and wintry weather when muddy boots were habitual, or he risked a barrage of verbal abuse from an irate kriegie.

The availability was present for a ground floor bed position if conditions warranted such a move, but ordinarily this space, devoid of bed boards, and straw palliase, was utilised for accommodating personal belongings in either boxes or kit bags. Later on during the latter part of 1943 these ground floor bed positions would be put into use by the Germans, although only for a short space of time.

Two large rectangular pillars were positioned in the approximate centre of the barrack hut, and these contained built in stoves, which were rarely in use due to a shortage of the appropriate fuel, coal briquettes. The hut furniture consisted of a total of fifteen rough, wooden tables, and associated with them were thirty long benches. This ensemble was in situ along the entire right hand side of the hut. Ten men were usually allocated to each table or section for ration purposes, each such section being numbered, with a nominated table leader in charge. This chap had the unenviable task of sharing out each daily issue of German rations, such as they were. This daily stint called for an unflappable nature, and nerves of steel, especially during the cutting up, and sharing out of the bread ration. The black bread ration for each table had to be scrupulously measured out, and meticulously cut literally to the "Thou". The ten men or so obviously insisted on their rightful share of this important commodity, so the division of the bread was always a very careful, and slow operation. The alternative was to spark off a very heated argument between the respective table members. The majority of each section were always present to witness the ceremony, in order to make sure that justice would seem to have been done. Nevertheless, it seemed there was always somebody who had a gripe, the pangs of hunger was no respecter of persons. Following the harrowing experience of being shot down, and narrowly escaping by parachute to be the only crew survivor, together with the following weeks of solitary confinement it was a pleasant change to be once again a part of the aircrew camaraderie even though it was now in entirely different circumstances. All that was possible now was to talk about it, and many a tale there was too, enough stories were on hand to fill many a book.

Pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, flight engineers, Wop/Ags, and straight Air gunners from different squadrons, and Groups, the majority belonging to Bomber Command, all had diverse stories to tell as to how they got the chop. Most had baled out from stricken aircraft, a few came down in the "drink", some had crash landed, and certainly all now had unlimited time to discuss every aspect of their demise. However, as time passed by line shoots eventually faded out as no further aircrew P.O.W.'s arrived henceforth, and instead numerous other varied topics were discussed in length, but in general they were probably two or three main subjects. During the hungry days it was invariably FOOD, alternatively when Red Cross food parcels were on a regular basis it was sport, if there was a third choice it was probably "crumpet" but now girls were just a memory existing only in dreams, and the realms of fantasy.

During my early kriegie months I was always hungry, but one had to make the best of things, which I did, and slowly settled in. I knew quite a few of the lads from bygone service days, and quickly became familiar with a host of new faces. After a period of acclimatisation inside hut 16 A, I moved from my initially allocated table to associate myself with section 31 to share the company of Jock Mcghie, "Jacko", Dave Johnstone, and messrs Bailey, Green, Jock Browne, Bren, and Atkinson, a good set of lads. At a later period, for whatever reason, I became table leader of this section, enough said, the job was not exactly a labour of love. During the year of 43 the camp was well organised, the British Camp Leader was Regimental Sergeant Major Sherriff, and the issue of Red Cross food parcels was on a regular basis, which meant that each kriegie received one parcel per week. This issue made up for the large deficiencies in the German rations, and gave us a balanced diet, and realistically, probably made all the difference between life, and death.

A British Red Cross food parcel consisted mainly of the following commodities :-

A small packet of Tea, Bar of chocolate, small tin of margarine, Bar of sugar, Biscuits, small pot of Jam, Tin Condensed milk, Tin pudding, Tin Vegetables, Tin of Meat and Veg, Small tin Sardines, Small tin Cheese, and a bar of Soap. In addition it was usual to receive a weekly Red Cross allocation of fifty cigarettes per man. Although the most common issue was a British parcel, at various times we received similar parcels sent through Red Cross channels from New Zealand, and Canada. The Canadian food parcel was the most frequent issue after its British counterpart, and, personally, I thought it was by far the best, certainly the most satisfying. I would say that most other P.O.W.s would agree with that assumption. British kriegies worked in the Red Cross store under German jurisdiction, who, awkward as ever punctured every tin in each food parcel before distribution, therefore obviating hoarding for escape purposes.

Apart from the usual contents of tinned meat, Spam, Salmon, Jam, Cheese, and Sugar the principal items of particular note in the Canadian parcel were the large tin of KLIM powdered milk, the twelve large hard circular biscuits, and the packet of raisins. The powdered milk was of excellent quality, rich tasting, and mixed really well with water. The biscuits were five or six inches across, and rock hard, but when soaked in water for a period of time would swell to be half as big again. The combination of all these three ingredients, Klim milk, a couple of the soaked biscuits, and a quantity of raisins made for a wholesome, rich tasting dish which proved very popular with all P.O.W.'s. In the Kriegie vernacular it was known as a Klim "glop", at least that is what I always called it, a conglomeration of soaked, broken up biscuits, mixed Klim powder, and raisins stirred up well whilst in the process of heating up.

On such occasions after partaking of a goodly portion of the finished concoction at the one and only main meal of the day, usually timed during the early evening, a warm glow would spread throughout my body. My stomach usually felt really blown up, but at the same time a comfortable feeling of contentment permeated ones system coupled with a compulsive desire to nod off. Without a doubt this was my favourite meal whilst in Gefangenenschaft, it would have been sacrilegious on my part to carry on with these memoirs, and ignore the laudative qualities of the KLIM "glop".

At Lamsdorf the routine was two Red Cross parcel issues per week, one between two men at each issue, so for the most part combines were the order of the day. The most popular combine of course, was a twosome, oneself and mate, but larger combines existed some of which consisted of four chaps, and some were in even larger numbers though these were in the minority. These partnerships both small and large frequently changed due to petty quarrels, and disagreements often over the general sharing out of the various food items.

Each barrack in our RAF Compound had its own "Brew King", a most important post in our P.O.W. environment, his title surely needs no explanation. Everybody, and I mean just that, gave up their small packet of Tea for this communal brew of "rosie" which, no doubt about it, helped to keep us going throughout the long days, and months of P.O.W. existence. The "Brew King's" job was almost a full time labour of love, as ingeniously he beget as many brews to the boil as he could possibly manage during each day. His expertise was beyond doubt and it was really amazing how many brews he managed to accomplish in any one day, the minimum was three, but I can recall our expert performing the ultimate one winters day during 43/44 when we imbibed five brews at various intervals throughout the day. A noteworthy achievement when it must be realised that the stock of Tea had to last out the week, and the provision of fuel for the fire was another question. The stentorian cry of "Brew Up" from the depths of the barrack was the signal for a frenzied dash by one and all for individual Stalag made tin cups, and a good position in the quickly forming queue as we all lined up in anticipation along the length of the barrack room.

The "Brew King's" working scene was in the wash house between the barracks, where an old fashioned "copper" was installed with a fire grate underneath. The fuel used for the fire was wood which was obtained by ourselves on organised "Wood parties" in the surrounding pine woods adjacent to the Stalag. I was a working member on quite a few Wood parties during my stay, which of course, were carried out with the permission of the Germans. A large cart was always provided on these excursions into the nearby woods which was hauled along manually by a team of six Kriegies inevitably flanked by several armed guards.

Wood party work, which was on a volunteer basis, was carried out during both summer, and winter months, from a personal point of view each outing was a pleasant change from the general boredom, and lethargy of normal prison camp daily routine. It was great to leave the barbed wire behind, and really exhilarating to breathe in deeply, and savour the fresh country air, but it was no picnic we had work to do, all in a good cause though. I really enjoyed the silence of the wooded country surroundings even during the freezing cold, and snowy Silesian winters, which were really bloody cold, being well below zero. True to form our wood party squads were always searched, and counted both on leaving ... and re-entering the main camp gates. Whilst we were busy cutting down, and amalgamating our piles of branches, and small timber, we always had a ring of guards around our small party, and finally at the end of the day they would steadfastly check the area before we left the forest, so escape was not a very practicable idea from a success point of view. In any case it was a remote spot especially in the subzero winter conditions with no food available, so it was hardly feasible. The large pile of wood which we periodically collected was used almost exclusively for tea brewing up purposes, and in this connection there was no doubt that our "Brew King" was worth his weight in gold. He really looked after our welfare, a few cuppas per day undoubtedly kept up our spirits.

The daily German rations were brought up from the main camp cookhouse which was sited a few hundred yards down the road from our compound. Early morning breakfast consisted only of a cup of ersatz mint tea, brought from the cookhouse into the barrack by two of our lads immediately after the morning roll call. Each barrack brought their own allocation, which was contained in a metal dustbin like receptacle carried on two wooden supports. Being a new boy, and not having a tin cup as yet (these were all fashioned from Red Cross food tins) I had to borrow one initially, and for the first few weeks or so I drank my ration, it was really awful, but warm and wet. After a time I fell in with the rest of the old stagers, and used my ration of mint tea for shaving purposes, blunt blade or no. Of course daily shaving was not a common occurrence, and many kriegies had grown, or were in the process of growing, a beard.

Between eleven am, and twelve noon was soup issue time, this was usually Swede, which on all occasions was the same old concoction of hot water with a few swede chunks floating about on the surface. New boys like me scoffed it immediately with obvious relish, at that period my stomach had not yet adjusted to P.O.W. conditions, but it certainly would in time, and so shrink somewhat. I would then be on a par with ~~with~~ the old lags, able to eke out the food rations more easily, in my early days, naturally, I was always hungry. The midday soup ration varied over the week, sometimes it was either Sauerkraut, ersatz "wood" soup, spinach, pea or millet. On only one occasion can I recall there being any meat mixed in with the German soup ration, and that was horse meat.

The midday soup ration was brought up from the cookhouse in the same dustbin type receptacle as the early morning mint tea, being transported in exactly the same way by two of my barrack inmates, who on entering the confines of our barrack hut would identify their presence with the shout of "Soup Up". Naturally one was always on the premises at at this appropriate time, when everybody lined up in table order with dixies at the ready. Some consumed their helping of soup right away while others kept their ration for later use to blend it with other edible items from their Red Cross parcels, when they cooked the main and only meal of the day, usually carried out between four, and six pm. During the early afternoon the "kartoffels" (potatoes) arrived, to be shared out by respective table leaders, Each individual share usually amounted to four potatoes, these had formerly been cooked in their skins.

During the winter months the potatoes were invariably bad or in poor condition and as in the daily bread share out the customary table audience was present to pass judgement if need be, among these onlookers there was always a guy who thought someone else had received a bigger share than him. Yes, the table leaders job could prove rather exasperating at times, and to think I allowed myself to take on such a chore at a later date. Still I was a phlegmatic character during those days, I must have been to take on such a thankless job.

The final act in the daily routine concerning the issue of German rations was the arrival of the barrack bread rations, under the experienced control of the compound "Bread King", and his team of assistants, the duty bread carriers. Each of our eight barrack huts had their own bread carriers, who usually sprang to the fore at or around 1430 hours when they quickly responded to their leader's stentorian verbal request of "Bread carriers at the gate". Very soon afterwards the party would return with a load of large black loaves for each barrack hut. Inside each hut the loaves were rationed out to each table on the basis of one eighth of a loaf per man. Once again each table leader would spring into action, knife at the ready, on each table they were at least ten shares. When I performed the job later on, I usually made use of a home made implement marked in sections for measuring each ration when cutting up the loaf. Nevertheless, the the procedure of sharing out the bread ration was always closely scrutinised, and whether they were your mates or not, more arguments erupted over the daily bread share out than anything else, probably because this commodity was the most important item of the German rations. The bread was not actually black in colour being more of a very darkish brown, it was very wholesome

containing quite a portion of potato and sawdust, but in spite of that I found the bread quite palatable, and even developed a liking for it. When fried with a couple of slices of Canadian Spam the combination was delicious.

Many of the lads disposed of their daily bread ration in one foul swoop, an easy accomplishment as one ration consisted of only a few slices, but the majority had only a slice or two with their one, and only main evening concoction, whatever it was, and kept the remaining one or two slices for the following morning brew of tea. Eking out the contents of a Red Cross food parcel in order to last out the whole week was a work of art, which most combines strictly adhered to, but there was always some kriegies lacking somewhat in the will power stakes, and these lads invariably saw the parcel off within the space of a few days.

In the main I have described the content of the very sparse German rations we received on a daily basis, but occasionally we received odd periodic issues of commodities which were all ersatz products, such as margarine made from coal, turnip jam, and some evil smelling fish cheese which was quite slimy. One had to be really desperately hungry to consume this "delicacy", but in my early kriegie days I must confess to succumbing to temptation quite frequently, at least until my stomach eventually came to terms with the stark reality of prisoner of war ^{EXISTENCE} and contracted somewhat.

Apart from the small ration of bread, swede and pea soup, and the ropey potatoes nearly everything else was ersatz (substitute). To give the Germans due credit they ingeniously turned out all sorts of products from such items as coal, and wood for edible purposes, but while we were in receipt of a regular weekly Red Cross food parcel most of these ersatz products were given the cold shoulder, though later on during the winter of 44/45 it would be a different story.

It goes without saying that without the Red Cross food parcels we would have been right up the proverbial creek without a paddle, and that is putting it mildly, in fact we would have been on a par with civilian concentration camp inmates.

It was true that our German captors did not keep to the Geneva Convention in respect of their obligations regarding the issue of food and clothing providing only very sparse rations, but no clothing at all. I along with my other contemporaries was provided with a pair of . . . service issue boots, greatcoat, and other necessary clothing items all of which had been sent from the U.K. through the International Red Cross Organisation at Geneva.

The RAF Compound at Lamsdorf was a separate entity, being a unit in itself, and was well organised with our own Compound Leader, Interpreter, . . . each of the eight barrack huts having their own elected commander. Cleanliness was of a high order, and various duties allocated were shared. The comradeship was generally first class, and the whole compound membership worked as a team, it was a large one, but without doubt . . . a close-knit outfit. The phrase "One for all and all for one" seems to fit the bill especially where the Germans were concerned.

The German N.C.O. in charge of our compound was a burly Wehrmacht Unteroffizier by the name of Kussell, but all the lads in blue knew him as "Ukraine Joe". I was aware that he was a hard case, although the longer term RAF kriegies in the compound would no doubt enlarge on that expression and say he was a proper bastard. I should think Joe was then in his forties, when I arrived on the scene he had been in charge of our RAF contingent for quite some time. It was said that he had formerly been in charge of the "Strafe Lager" (punishment block) at Lamsdorf where he had made his tough reputation. The Stalag Kommandant, no doubt, thought he was just the man needed to keep the RAF lot in check as we, along with the "Dieppe" Canadian Army POW's were the acknowledged bad lads of the camp, only in the German eyes, of course. "Ukraine Joe" never missed a trick he was very shrewd, had a very good eye for a face, and had picked up a small amount of English, he would always start off with the same small phrase "Ah, Mister" when

confronting a RAF kriegie. There was no doubt he had a dubious past, and various colourful stories were abroad concerning those bygone days. Had he been previously connected with the Berlin police? Had he been some sort of assassin? I do not think anybody really knew whether all the stories were correct or not, I certainly did not. He was also alleged to have shot a couple of kriegies, I knew from experience that Joe was very handy with his side arm gun butt. During the action packed minutes before morning roll call in their attempts to get us all outside on parade "Ukraine Joe", and his side kick, a Gefreiter, used their pistol gun butts regularly, and indiscriminately in their frantic endeavours to clear the barrack huts. This habitual early morning event was always an uproarious occasion in our compound, consequently a great length of time usually elapsed before all our eight barrack complement had formed up in hut order ready to be counted.

I can recall one summer day seeing "Ukraine Joe" chasing a kriegie through one of our barrack huts. His quarry was running pell-mell at the same time swerving violently to avoid other POW's with Joe in hot pursuit. The German Unteroffizier gun in hand was firing spasmodically as, red of face, he continued his hunt. At the same time many other innocent kriegies in the immediate vicinity, without showing much surprise, scattered in all directions, some diving for cover to avoid the line of fire, and the odd bullet. The uneven contest carried on as the chase progressed through other of our barrack huts, but I cannot recall how it finished up, at the time I discreetly kept out of the way, it was not prudent to get involved when bullets were flying about. I should think "Ukraine Joe's" name was pencilled in the black book for retribution when the war came to its close, and in fact I heard on the post war grapevine that he had been taken prisoner in the Western theatre of operations before the cessation of hostilities. The knowledge of his subsequent fate still eludes me, but I hope it was something drastic.

The Germans called two "Appels" (roll calls) each day with the early morning parade being held at seven am. Our barrack commander was always to the fore, and would leave his cubby hole at the top end of the barrack some minutes before zero hour, stride down the length of the hut shouting "Outside on Parade", and then retrace his steps to continue his vocal persuasive role. On these occasions his was a fruitless job, he usually obtained little response. The majority of the barrack occupants were ever reluctant to leave their bunks, it was the same in all the other barracks huts throughout our compound.

ALLES The German Unteroffizier "Ukraine Joe", and his lesser minions would then be in action chasing through the barracks shouting, and screaming "Aufstehen" "Aufstehen" intermingled with "Raus" "Raus", literally frothing at the mouth. At the same time their pistol gun butts were in constant action being aimed at the heads, and shoulders of scrambling, hastily attired airmen as they belatedly attempted all manner of evasive actions, ducking and swaying to avoid the blows. The nearest exit to the parade ground was the aim. Amidst the general pandemonium various kriegies struggled in their attempts to climb through the sacking draped windows in order to get out onto the parade ground, others continued to stream through the main door of the barrack hut. Several of the hastily attired lads managed to throw on their greatcoats to cover sleeping garments before diving headlong through other of the windows, it was indeed fortunate that the great majority of these were devoid of glass. Yes, the early morning roll call in the RAF compound was always an uproarious occasion. I must admit that although I was never an early riser, my daily morning "Appel" appearance was always well timed to set foot outside by zero hour, so I cannot lay claim to any spectacular diving exits through windows.

Despite all manner of threats, reprisals, and gun butt blows our compound was always the last block in the Stalag to be counted. The whole of the Army blocks were out on parade, counted, and dismissed long before we were suitably lined up in barrack formation. On frequent occasions groups of Army kriegies, taking an early stroll, having completed their early roll call, would stop on the road outside our locked up compound, and view our capers with great amusement. However, I did not think that their outward demeanour reflected their true thoughts, the Army way of looking at things was totally different to our outlook. This state of events happened frequently in our compound, but never at any time did we knuckle down to the harsh discipline, despite all the many German reprisals. These counter measures were often in action, the most favoured by our captors was the locking, and closing of our compound for various lengths of time, thus confining all to barracks. With the gates permanently locked during these periods nobody could get either in or out of our block, the only exceptions being the receiving, and collecting of the daily rations. Other privileges were forfeited, while another regular punishment, readily, and frequently administered, was the retention of our entire RAF contingent on the parade ground. Following the early morning roll call we would be kept standing, in barrack formation, for hours on end surrounded by a host of armed guards. These guards belonged to a special unit, which we knew as the "Stalag Watch", not to be classed with the normal prison guards who regularly patrolled our barracks during the day. This body of well armed trouble shooters had itchy trigger fingers, were somewhat unstable, and naturally not too pleased to be kept standing about for hours without administering a more stringent type of punishment. Such was their frame of mind that it took only a small degree of provocation for them to go right off the deep end. Looking back it never ceases to amaze me how they took so much from us RAF kriegies without shooting a few. I must say that at times it got very, very close to that despite our Compound Leader's constant vocal warnings to cool it. The Germans could never understand our sense of humour, and in many cases our sheer cheek in adverse circumstances.

The Nazi media called us "Luftgangsters" or "Terrorflieger", but ^{some of} the German servicemen had a lot of respect for our general attitude, and never say die spirit even if they hated our guts. The late afternoon "Apell" happened around five pm, and did not present the same difficulties to Ukraine Joe, and his assistant as in the early morning, and the meticulous counting of each barrack's numbers usually went off without any undue mishaps. When our compound was not closed it was possible to visit, and wander through other compounds via the camp roads, and contact the different occupants, they were many different nationalities in this barbed wire city of Lamsdorf. The main idea was in reality a search amongst the many Army lads to see if I could spot a face from the past. I found just that in the person of a member of the Duke of Wellington's Light Infantry who hailed from my home town of Stockton-on-Tees, and whom I had known in my school days when he had been a good soccer player. His Army oppo I did not know, but ironically I bumped into him a few years after the war ended in Leicester, which just goes to prove its a small world after all.

Mail from home naturally was one of the highlights of P.O.W. life, and when the barrack commander strolled out into the centre of things, and shouted "Mail up" the normal noisy atmosphere of the hut ceased temporarily, he would then be surrounded immediately within a ring of jostling kriegies with their ears tuned in to his frequency, eagerly anticipating, and hoping that their names would be called out. Some would be lucky, and for the others their turn would probably arrive next time. Most of the RAF mail did not come direct, but arrived via Stalag Luft 3, Sagan, and consequently took a bit longer than usual to arrive at Lamsdorf. The reason for this all hinged on the RAF connotations pertaining to the address on the letter i.e. rank of Flight Sgt or anything else signifying RAF meant that ~~it~~ any such letter would go through Luftwaffe channels, and end up at Luft 3 at Sagan. From a P.O.W. point of view we were rationed as far as writing home was concerned, and were allowed to write and send only one letter card, and four postcards per month, I think that was the quota. Through the auspices of the Red Cross Organization a personal parcel with a certain limit of weight could be sent from home once every three months, these were eagerly anticipated by myself, and all and sundry. Apart from personal clothing items most used to contain several pounds of chocolate, which, of course, was specially requested. These ^{Personal parcels made for} good propoganda, the Germans, whose job it was to open these parcels on entry into Stalag 8 B, must have showed their chagrin, while examining the contents, and at the same time must have been green with envy, they hardly ~~had~~ ^{had} sight of any chocolate in their own wartime environment. It was the same with our personal cigarette parcels from home, the poor old Jerries had a cigarette ration of only five per day. It is fitting to say that cigarettes were the camp currency, and one never went hungry if one had bags of the noxious weed. I never was in that category, in fact relatively poor, but some kriegies had abundant stocks, and they were all Canadians in our compound, a few of which lived in my barrack 16 A.

When I arrived in the Stalag in April 1943 the entire complement of the RAF Compound which totalled ~~OVER ONE~~ thousand were handcuffed throughout each day. This ^{infamous} procedure had been in operation quite a few months being the result of German reprisals in connection with happenings during the Dieppe raid which took place on the 19th August, 1942. The German High Command had alleged that the Allied landing force had ill treated some German prisoners of war by binding their hands behind their backs, and in consequence they issued orders that some P.O.W.'s were to be put in chains by way of reprisal, but at first twine or string was used until chains became available. RAF aircrew personnel were costly, highly trained individuals, and obviously the Germans look ^{ed} upon us as special cases for strict treatment, and in this respect the RAF men at Lamsdorf were singled out to carry the can. When it all started the RAF kriegies at Stalag 8B had their hands tied with Red Cross string by the guards, some tightly, some loosely which must have made things bloody awkward, especially when performing the necessary functions. The daily period in question was from eight in the morning till seven pm in the evening, and the string routine must have been quite a caper. The old lags who were involved were not amiss in shooting the odd line about their experiences during this hectic period to lads like me who were not present at the time. Shortly afterwards however chains were introduced, and these in fact were Gestapo handcuffs which were divided by a long chain about ~~the~~ eighteen inches in length which enabled me to put my hands in my pockets whilst wearing the cuffs. By the time I had arrived in the Compound the handcuffs had become a formality, and part of the daily routine. German guards brought, and distributed the requisite number of handcuffs after early morning roll call usually around eight am to our barrack 16 A., the same routine was carried out in the other seven barracks in our compound. Everybody lined up for the snapping on of the handcuffs, the German order was to wear them continuously throughout the day under the threat of punishment. Guards passed through our barracks at regular intervals throughout the day for obvious reasons, and, outside on the camp roads it was the same story, if a blue uniformed RAF type was observed minus his manacles it was the German Vorlager for the culprit where he would spend the rest of the day standing rigidly to attention facing the barbed wire fence, with a guard behind him rifle butt at the ready if the lad faltered or moved. Where theres a will theres a way, and it did not take long to find a solution. ~~ONE~~ clever airman found out that he could unlock the handcuffs, with of all things, a sardine tin key, once again the Red Cross had turned up trumps. Discreetly the news was passed on by word of mouth, and the sardine tin keys were soon in great demand, a must for the airmen's pocket. From then on we took our chances, especially in the barracks, and discarded our manacles whenever possible, but kept them handy for instant use. Lookouts were posted strategically, and the shout went up when guards were in the vicinity.

During the nightly period after lights out our Compound, and the adjacent camp roads were patrolled by guards who were accompanied by trained dogs usually German shepherds or Dobermans. Inside the compounds the guards would then let the dogs off the leash.

During this period of time when the compound gates were closed and locked up it was forbidden to leave our respective barrack huts, therefore the main outside latrine, known colloquially as "The Forty Hole r" was officially out of bounds, and could not be used. The night replacement latrine of sorts was a large wooden tub about three feet in circumference, and about two feet six inches in height, one such tub was allocated to each of our huts. Inside my barrack hut 16 A it was normally placed in an alcove near the entrance door. Inevitably with the German rations being more or less of a liquid content, aided and abetted by our usual daily brews of Tea meant that invariably the tub was overflowing well before the early morning roll call. Throughout the night a seemingly endless procession of bleary eyed, half asleep kriegies shuffled their weary way along the length of the barrack hut to answer the unavoidable call of nature. With about one hundred and fifty hut residents the bloody tub was always full to the brim, and regularly overflowed resulting in an evil smelling hell, of a mess which extended some distance around the tub. Obviously we kriegies had the unenviable job of cleaning up the mess, and emptying the tub each morning, which was always an herculean task needing two or more beds. I took part in this exercise more than a few times, and when doing so my boots, and trousers were always sodden with excess urine, but everybody took their turn at this job on a rota basis.

As far as the Germans were concerned RAF aircrew kriegies were uncooperative and bloody minded and this meant that quite a lot ignored the ~~instr~~ "Jerry" instructions, and chanced their luck during the night to visit the outside "40 Holer" in order to relieve themselves. To achieve this, of course, meant leaving by one of the barrack hut windows, and covering about fifty to seventy yards at the gallop. Some succeeded in making both journeys without any mishap but alternatively some hit trouble during the re turn journey, and only managed to make it by the skin of their teeth with a final despairing leap or a headlong dive through the windows just escaping the jaws of a rapidly advancing fierce hound. It was indeed fortunate for us that almost all the hut windows were devoid of glass, sacking being the substitute, but all the lads were aware of this as they made their efforts, but it was still a dangerous pastime. The notorious but primitive "40 Holer" was situated on the far side of our compound, and served the needs of our entire RAF complement. It was essentially a smallish building built around, and over a pit. Inside the ~~all-shelling~~ place was a raised wooden platform just over eighteen inches above the floor level with forty circular holes on the outside of a square over which I and the other RAF kriegies could deposit our posteriors. All the circular holes were above a eight to ten feet deep pit which was infested by large evil looking black rats who could climb part of the brick walls of the pit. The utmost care was essential in performing the main call of nature, and without exaggeration the usual practice, I can emphatically vouch for this from personal experience, was to cup ones private parts protectively with one hand the other wise it was possible that I or any other kriegie might have ended up singing that old RAF aircrew ballad "No balls at all, etc".

In point of fact there was a popular story which concerned the perils of the "40" holer, and this tale had circulated far and wide within the confines of our compound. To many it may seem to be a tall story, but I had heard it myself from several sources so it can be said to be well founded.

It concerns the tribulation of one poor old RAF kriegie who was said to have suffered the fate I have previously mentioned. In a visit to the "40" holer he failed to observe the one handed safety routine, and paid the penalty. The unfortunate airman had to undertake what was a long walk from our compound down to the Lazarette (hospital) with a large black rat, ^{tee} th inserted, hanging from his testicles. Whether the horrible rodent was dead or otherwise I cannot say, and not being an eye witness I also cannot vouch for the authenticity of the story. On the other hand I can truthfully verify that such an incident could definitely have occurred to any careless individual, there was no doubt about that. I certainly protected myself in the prescribed manner during every visit to perform the main call of nature. I could look down through any of the forty holes, and plainly see the bloody rats crawling around the walls of the pit. In any case the "Ferty Holer" was a vile, evil smelling building, the stench was with us constantly, being particularly vile, and pungent during the hot summer months, it was a situation I and everybody else became accustomed to.

The Germans drained the pit periodically with the aid of a civilian attendant, and his conveyance, a wooden cigar shaped receptacle on wheels which was horse drawn.

The attendant used a hand pump to extract the excrement through a pipe into the top opening of the wooden cigar shaped barrel. Several trips were always necessary to empty the large pit, and the stench became even worse as quite an amount was spilled during each operation. The produce was used as a fertiliser, and as such was spread over the fields adjacent to the Stalag, which meant that the unwholesome smell was ever present being both inside, and outside the prison camp, it was not exactly ozone like in its permeations.

With the sardine tin key readily available the risks were well worth taking, although a few were caught in the act including myself, and in common with the others I spent six hours with my nose confronting the barbed wire inside the German Vorlager, with a member of the Wehrmacht breathing down my neck, rifle butt ready for action. During the summer of 43 the handcuffs procedure had now reached the farcical stage for all concerned, but one day the lid blew off, and the whole scene erupted. It was my barrack hut 16 A that was involved in what turned out to be a very nasty situation indeed. The Germans alleged that various unknown inmates of our barrack hut had sabotaged several sets of handcuffs allocated to us, and demanded that six of us should step forward, and accept the blame. The consequences being a charge of sabotage, a trial, and possibly a term in a civvy jail. Once incarcerated in such circumstances meant that one could lose P.O.W. status, and the risk of permanent disappearance from the scene, it had happened before.

Our barrack commander, assisted by our own "Dolmetscher" (Interpreter), refused to comply with the German's demands, and consequently the balloon went up. The Stalag watch (German Vorlager storm troops) were called out at the double, and very soon arrived in our compound fully armed with automatic weapons at the ready. Guttural commands were bawled out as they streamed into our barrack to unceremoniously herd our entire complement outside on to the parade ground. The compound gates were closed and locked as I and over a hundred of my hut colleagues stood in line in the centre of the open part of the compound. At this point we were entirely surrounded by armed grim faced German soldiers, inevitably first of all we were counted, always the opening gambit. The German officer in charge was strutting about the parade ground brandishing his Walther pistol, at the same time aiming a volume of abuse at our immobile barrack complement, all delivered in his own inimitable gesticulative manner. The veins on his forehead were really standing out, he was now really worked up literally frothing at the mouth, and appeared to be right on the brink, one little push would have sent him right over the top. His lesser minions took a leaf out of his book, and started to act in the same manner, it was nothing new we had seen it all before.

Both our barrack commander, and RAF compound leader, who was now present, urged us all to keep our cool, and not to rock the boat during this critical situation. This was, obviously, good advice as our German entourage were worked up to such a trigger happy state that they needed little or no excuse to commence firing. This tense confrontation continued throughout the afternoon, and as the hours slowly passed by our tired legs stood the strain as we shuffled from one leg to another not attempting a great deal of movement. The many German guards, gun butts at the ready, were breathing down our necks itching to go into action, we had to be careful not to supply them with any sort of motive. We were kept standing on the parade ground throughout the remainder of the day, and as the time relentlessly rolled by the Germans slowly simmered down somewhat. At spasmodic intervals during the afternoon the German officer, our Compound Leader, barrack commander, and Interpreter had been hotly engaged in conversation. Apparently our custodians still insisted on the surrender of hostages, we had told them initially that it was either the whole barrack complement or nothing at all, there would be no victimisation of individuals. Our Compound representatives stood firm on this issue.

It was early evening before the tense situation became more or less normal. Somehow the very prolonged negotiations were eventually concluded to our satisfaction, we had got away with it, nobody "carried the can", and we were allowed to return to our barrack hut, thankfully without any casualties. Very soon after this episode, I recall it was during either the months of August or September, the handcuffs suddenly disappeared from the scene permanently. On reflection I would venture to say that the Germans at Lamsdorf were as relieved as we occupants of the RAF Compound, probably more so, when the order arrived from Berlin for the cessation of the handcuff farce.

By the Autumn of 1943 the Lamsdorf camp was probably better organized than ever before especially the camp school, which accommodated a wide variety of different subjects. I tried my hand at German lessons with a far off idea of "swopping over", but the grammar defeated me, and strangely for me, found I had not the patience for studying, so that was that.

Our own camp newspaper, articles of which were pinned up on a wall inside the school proved very interesting, and I was involved at one time to write up one or two football match reports for it. The Germans issued their own newspaper for P.O.W.'s which was entitled "The Camp". This was a small effort comprising about four pages in all, and was usually loaded with artful propaganda, and well chosen articles from our home newspapers, such as news about strikes etc. As far as I was concerned copies of "The Camp" came in very handy for use as "bum fodder".

A camp theatre was also in operation, and many plays, revues etc were produced which proved to be very popular, even to the Germans, a few of which were always in attendance at these showings, a fellow Wop/Ag from our Compound was one of the leading actors. It was amazing what went on under cover in the camp, there was even an assortment of home made stills where "jungle juice" was brewed secretly using various ingredients such as potato peelings, dried fruit from food parcels, and beet polish. The end product was really potent, best left alone, something similar to drinking meths, the concoction really deadened the senses. I never had the opportunity to consume any Stalag made "jungle juice", but I had seen what effect it had on the individual, and I would not have sampled any for all the tea in China.

During this period life was more or less tolerable with a regular supply of Red Cross parcels being issued, and in consequence a varied selection of camp "racketeers" was now very much in evidence. . . . Several of them ran "swap shops", and of course cigarettes were used for the purchase of the various items that were on sale, some of which were tins of food from Red Cross food parcels. As a Kriegie if you were lucky enough to possess a stock of cigarettes you could certainly live pretty well. The Canadians in our compound were in this category, they seemed to have more cigs than anyone else, for the following reasons. Their cigarette parcels sent from Canada were mammoth in comparison, just one parcel contained no less than one thousand fags which were mainly Macdonalds in packets of twentyfive, ~~these~~ were a good smoke. These parcels sent from their homes, and friends seemed to arrive more quickly, and frequently than ours from the U.K., they must surely have had a good route in transit. If I sound envious, I bloody well was at the time, the Canucks in our hut had such a large stock of cigarettes in their possession that they had to procure and use lockable wooden boxes or trunks to safeguard their wares. These "treasure chests" hidden underneath the respective owner's bunks contained, in some cases, several thousand cigarettes. What bargaining power the Canadians possessed, it is little wonder these lads were never hungry. Such lucky individuals could afford to buy bread, and other various on sale items from the racketeers and Swap Shops. In the general scheme of things a loaf of bread was usually obtainable via the racketeers, and the odd German guard, the price being fifty cigarettes per loaf. The poor English cousins, like myself, were never in the same boat, in almost two years of P.O.W. existence I only received four cigarettes parcels from home, each of which contained two hundred players, that amount seemed to be the norm for one cigarette parcel sent from the U.K. .

The moral of that story must mean that a Kriegie lived well as long as he had a "bank" of the noxious weed, with the majority just struggling along normally. On the other hand the Germans on their miserable pittance of five cigarettes per day must have scratched their heads, and wondered at our apparent limitless resources, on the visible face of things how could they possibly win the war.

The population of this barbed wire metropolis which was Stalag 8 B was made up of many nationalities, although the majority were British others included Canadians, Aussies, New Zealanders, South Africans, Indians, Sikhs, Palestinians, Cypriots, and all these included prisoners from all walks of life. Most were "average" prisoners, but there was a sprinkling of wide boys, racketeers, and they was even a "Gorbals" type razor gang who had quite a few compounds, and the cookhouse in the palm of their hands. One night this gang, for whatever reason happened to be in our Compound, and attempted to intimidate our barrack hut 16 A, but came off second best. They could not have known very much about us RAF types, or they never would have risked attempting any rough stuff. It all happened during a normal average night in our barrack hut. Some inmates were at their tables playing bridge while others were stretched out on their bunks meditating or reading until the commotion started just after nine pm. Seven or eight "brown" jobs entered our hut coming in from the adjoining hut 16 B to stagger along the open space between the line of tables, and ^{our} sleeping accommodation. It was obvious to all concerned that this bunch were under the influence of Stalag made "Jungle Juice": as they shuffled along shouting, singing but also acting in an antagonistic fashion, in short making a bloody nuisance of themselves. We never stood for any of this nonsense, and sure enough an incident occurred which resulted in one of the intruders being knocked out, seemingly unconscious, he was dead to the world. One of my barrack mates, a trifle annoyed at their pugnacious antics, had unceremoniously dealt out swift retribution, a right cross to the chin. The drooping razor gang laddie out to the wide was then carried into our barrack commander's cubby hole at the top end of our hut to be laid on one of the bunks. (wing to his deadened senses due solely to the combined effects of the blow, and the potency of the concoction he had been imbibing, the Army lad failed to regain consciousness, he ultimately spent the remainder of the night in our barrack hut. Meanwhile the remainder of the gang, who in the interim had been

uttering threats galore, summoned their leader who duly arrived with a great flourish some thirty minutes after the incident. He looked a very insignificant sort of chap to me, and when he took the stage his performance was both comical, and pathetic as we witnessed his dramatics. Standing close by I found it difficult to suppress my mirth, obviously the gang leader really thought he was Jimmy Cagney as he commenced to go through all the tough guy routine. He abhorred the fact that we had knocked out one of his boys, and proceeded to ramble on about the consequences, yes, it was really going to happen to us after lights out. It did not seem to penetrate his tiny mind that we were entirely unmoved by his threats. Assisted by a series of theatrical gestures he threatened that he and his gang would then, I quote his own words, "Do our barrack over". Obviously in such a heavily populated camp this combination of Army misfits were complete strangers to us, but they were warned in no uncertain terms that if they returned the whole of our barrack membership would be waiting for them, and they would be only one outcome which would certainly not be in their favour. The gang leader was finally told in emphatic voice that we RAF lads were a solid unit, and would not be intimidated by anyone, razors or no. While continuing to utter all manner of threats intermingled with a variety of obscene expletives the pseudo "Cagney", together with his underlings, departed from our scene about half an hour before lights out. As they shambled through the door of our barrack hut the gang were still shouting loudly that they would be back, an act of misjudged bravado on their part.

I sat perched on my top bunk with a single bed board at the ready for offensive action if required, some of the other lads were similarly equipped, but the razor gang did not return, they obviously did not relish the odds, not being accustomed to meeting solid opposition. However the following morning the pseudo "Jimmy Cagney" turned up in our barrack to collect his henchman who by then had fully recovered from the double effects of his blow, and the "jungle juicer" The gang leader, in direct contrast to his previous nights capers, condescendingly thanked our barrack commander for taking such good care of his man, and they then departed from the scene. Needless to say the Stalag razor gang did not venture into the RAF Compound ever again after the showdown. As I have stated previously Stalag 8 B was mainly a transit camp involving the movement to and fro of POW working parties operating throughout Silesia in both agricultural, and Industrial areas. The Germans obviously tried to get as many Army P.O.W.'s as possible out on these Arbeits Kommandos. The much larger working camps were situated at Blechhammer, and Gleiwitz in the Industrial region. Under the Geneva Convention only private soldiers were obliged to work, although some Army N.C.O.'s volunteered for working parties in order to obtain better rations, and conditions. The inmates of the RAF Compound were of course almost all aircrew N.C.O.'s with the odd exceptions being ground crew plus one or two Army lads from special units like the L.R.D.G. (Long Range Desert Group), and S.A.S. (Special Air Service), and so we were permanent camp residents. Even so regardless of the Convention ruling the Germans would not have relished the thought of us on working parties with the obvious opportunity to get lost amidst the country side, and take off. The most popular working parties it would seem were connected with factories agriculture, and the sawmills, certainly the worst were the coal mines, and quite a few Army kriegis did drastic things to themselves in order to avoid the mines.

As far as escape was concerned we in the RAF Compound at Lamsdorf had only one avenue available to us, and that was to "swop over" with an Army lad who was designated for an outgoing working party. This caper was, and had always been, very prevalent during the summer of 43, and they must have been fifty or more "swop overs" in our Compound. During both 1942 and 43 "swop over" escape from working parties proved to be a big thorn in the side of the German authorities causing them endless trouble in all manner of ways. Although the majority never made it, and were ultimately picked up to be brought back to the Stalag to face a spell of solitary confinement in the punishment block many of the RAF escapees from different working parties managed to cover great distances, and a few were finally captured just short of success at places such as the ports of Danzig and Stettin on the Baltic coast, the locale of the Swiss border, Czecho-Slovakia, Yugo Slaw and Poland. We had our own Escape Committee who provided help and assistance, and all the information on projected outgoing working parties for would be "swop overs". They were always some Army lads who were not keen on going out "Arbeits", and therefore were willing to change identities with a would be RAF escapee, but it was not as easy as it seemed, for ideally the swop over had to be similar in build, with more or less the same colouring, although at a pinch the hair could be dyed.

Potentially suitable "swoop overs" necessarily had their homework to study, both had to remember all particulars, and details of their new identities together with service and P.O.W. numbers, dates of birth, place of capture etc to finally swoop uniforms, and discs when the RAF escapee would then move into the working party compound with his Army substitute slipping unobtrusively into the RAF compound where his new barrack companions would put him at ease until he settled in.

"Ukraine Joe", our compound Unteroffizier, was very vigilant, he had eyes like a hawk with an uncanny knack of picking out "swoop overs" so obviously it was prudent for new faces to keep out of his way for as long as possible. Unteroffizier Kussell had a reputation for not forgetting a face, but they were a thousand faces in our compound, and observant as he undoubtedly was he could not recognise everybody. Of course he did spot and pick out quite a few "swoop overs" which were new faces to him, and his approach was always the same "Ah, Mister" he would say with a confident smirk, "Nix Flieger" "Kommen sie Mit", and that would be it, questioning would obviously follow.

Each outgoing working party finally assembled inside the German Verlager for checking purposes before leaving the Stalag. In the summer of 1943 there was alleged to be a certain female who had been newly posted onto the Admin staff at Lamsdorf reputedly an expert at picking out RAF would be escapers in outgoing working parties, her special expertise being the study of the photographic records, the "mug" shots. It follows therefore that a few of the lads did not get any further than the Admin block on their way out, the result then being either fourteen or twenty one days in the Strafe (punishment) block. Nevertheless many were the RAF "swoop overs" who succeeded in clearing the Stalag, bided their time on their respective working party, and eventually made their break when the right chance or moment arrived. In view of the geographical situation of our particular region, without German money together with a reasonable knowledge of the language and escaper had to be extremely lucky to make it, especially with the great distances involved. Even so some spent quite a few months on the run, although most of them finished up back at Lamsdorf unhappy at being apprehended, but reasonably pleased with their efforts.

As far as we RAF boys were concerned tunnelling was a dead duck, and out of the question, the reason being that Lamsdorf was such a large camp, and our compound was situated more or less in the centre of things. Thus the outer double barbed wire fence was much too far away from our huts so tunnelling was not deemed practical. During my term in the Stalag as far as I can recall I only knew of one tunnel attempt from one of the outer compounds. This tunnel was apparently tipped off to the Germans who seemingly turned up one morning, and sealed it off.

Later the dead body of a Palestinian Cypriot P.O.W. was found one morning by the Germans floating inside a large concrete lined water container. Was it retribution? Nobody ever found out, a cloak of silence hung over the camp, and even the Germans certainly did not bother to investigate further.

To any interested kriegie onlookers there was always some sort of activity going on outside the wire of the camp, some of which concerned the German Army as the flat terrain around the Stalag was used by Wehrmacht units for training purposes, exercises, and manoeuvres.

A Russian P.O.W. camp was also situated a few miles from us, I had heard many stories concerning this camp.

No Geneva Convention protected these poor souls, therefore the Germans had no obligation in their treatment of Russian P.O.W.'s. They existed ~~on~~ attempted to do so, on starvation rations. It was a common sight to see them shambling along the path which ran along the outskirts of the pine wood just outside the high double outer barbed wire fence of our camp. On these occasions during the early evening the Russian kriegies were returning from some sort of work as they slowly made their way back to camp. The Russian prisoners were in such a poor, emaciated condition that only one or two guards were sufficient to control a party of them. They were simply walking zombies, the poor buggers were gaunt with sunken faces, filthy, they would never see any soap not even the ersatz variety, and their ragged appearance was certainly scarecrowlike in equality. The ~~ir~~ only footwear being "Fusslappen" (small pieces of cloth which were wrapped around the feet secured by bits of string).

Occasionally one of these Russian kriegies would collapse to be immediately shot by the guards, invariably the body was left behind at the spot where it fell. I was not the only Lamsdorf prisoner to have observed helplessly, such coldblooded actions. The Germans considered the Russian kriegies as "Untermenschen" (subhumans), and treated them as such, one could not begin to compare our P.O.W. existence with their lot.

We in the RAF compound at Lamsdorf had no means of giving the Russkis a helping hand, although we made the most of a single opportunity which came our way during the summer of 43. During this period our compound was, as usual, on the receiving end of a series of systematic disciplinary measures. One of these resulted in the Germans opening or stabbing all the tins in our Red Cross feed parcels during each weekly issue.

This form of chastisement meant we had to think fast in order to avoid the problem of tinned meat going bad in the seasonal hot weather. Heads compounded, a quick decision was made which resulted in a deputation, headed by our RAF compound leader, seeking an interview with the camp Kommandant. Somehow or other our fine body of men obtained their necessary permission which allowed us in the RAF compound to collect, and

then send across to the poor old Russkis, a consignment of our stabbed tins of meat. The collection was hastily organised throughout each of our eight barrack huts, ~~each~~ ^{every} combine of two responded with one tin of meat from their feed parcel, the main choice being corned beef which did not keep fresh for very long after its tin had been opened. The total consignment was swiftly sent across to the starving Russian kriegies; there was no doubt that all was gratefully received.

When the war eventually came to its conclusion, with the Russians now in the driving seat, they certainly got their revenge as thousands of German prisoners were incarcerated within the vast regions of the U.S.S.R for many years after the cessation of hostilities before they were eventually released, but a great many just literally disappeared.

Many thousands of Russian P.O.W.'s died as a result of Typhus, carried by lice, such epidemics were prevalent in the drastic conditions which were current throughout the ir camps. The mere mention of the word TYPHUS really put the breeze up the Germans, there was many a scare in our Stalag, and resultant panic. De-lousing was carried out throughout our camp, ones uniform would reek for weeks from the gas like process used in the de-lousing chamber. During one precautionary period all the occupants of our compound received an anti-typhus jab

administered by our own M.O.'s, and towards the end of this procedure the unlucky lad at the rear had to contend with some very blunt needles. This procedure emphasised just how fortunate we were in respect of the availability of medicines, serums, tablets, and the like which were all sent from the U.K. through the International Red Cross at Geneva. We had a very good hospital, The Lazarette, attached to our camp at Lamsdorf which housed some of our own very dedicated, and able Medical Officers.

In our RAF compound a regular sick parade was held daily in a cubicle situated in my own barrack hut 16 A, which was normally occupied by a medical orderly.

During our absence the empty camp had been well and truly searched, turned over I would say was the correct term, and at the same time diligently checked for prohibited goods i.e. wireless sets, escape materials, and the like.

In common with the rest of the Stalag, my barrack hut 16 A was in a hell of a mess when we returned, everything had been really turned over. Palliases, blankets, boxes, personal effects, and food parcel remnants had all been haphazardly scattered all around our bunks, and tables, in fact the whole of the interior of our hut was an area of destruction. The Germans left behind to search had really gone to town, and in their own inimable fashion must have truly relished ransacking in such a vindictiver manner, no doubt with a smirk on their faces, and a silent thought of "Up yours, Englanders". As we struggled on, well into the evening, striving to put our house in order, the air was blue with obscene curses, the colourful language was not entirely complimentary to Mein Fuhrer, and his lesser minions, but that sort of unwinding helped to make the job a wee ^{bit} more tolerable. In a pause for thought at the end of an eventful day one of our motto's quickly came to mind, "Nil Carborundum", which in RAF parlance meant "Do not let the bastards grind you down", it is sufficient to say that we never did.

In our austere barrack huts bed bugs were abounding so we had to put up with the various bites, but we were fairly clear of lice, despite the conditions we kept the huts, and ourselves as clean as was possible.

The Germans were anything but complacent, barrack room and compound searches were made periodically by our captors, but one day we experienced the big one, an impromptu search of the entire Stalag. When this day dawned it certainly seemed as if the camp was being invaded, hundreds of puzzled kriegies, including myself, gaped openmouthed in amazement, for it looked as if the entire German Army was on hand. The scenes that followed could only be described as mass pandemonium. Every compound in the entire prison camp was encroached by hordes of German soldiers, barracks were emptied of their occupants in a none too genteel fashion, for the kriegies to be paraded, and counted. Finally, compound by compound, the complete P.O.W. population of Stalag 8 B was then marched out through the main gates to come to a halt in the open country adjoining the camp. Amidst the general air of confusion, the babble of thousands of kriegie voices, and the harsh, guttural commands of the German Army units not many kriegies knew exactly what the hell was going on. However, everybody soon realised that that this unusual exercise was to aid and abet a surprise search of the whole Stalag. At this stage, the vast barbed wire complex that was Lamsdorf, was clearly visible a short distance away. Surrounded by the flat, green terrain of the countryside our huge mass of now immobile prisoners were then herded together resulting in a conglomeration of the various compounds. When our multitudes had been forcibly compressed into a somewhat circular mass we were finally encircled by a vast cordon of fully armed German troops, equipped with machine guns, and other automatic weapons. Following four or five hours of eye to eye confrontation our guardians decided it was time to make a move. Once again it was bedlam, with numerous bawling Teutonic words of command drowning the bird like chatter of countless kriegie voices as we were ordered to form up yet again in Compound formation. As we marched back towards camp, and our respective compounds I idly exchanged views with Jim Scobie, a Kiwi navigator, who was my combine mate at the time. A penny for my thoughts, well, they were probably blank at that moment, that certain day was certainly nothing to enthuse over, although one could say that it was certainly a change from the normal routine. Phlegmatic as ever, nothing bothered me, it was simply another day. As a kriegie one had to press on in an untroubled, cheerful way it was fatal to get withdrawn into ones self. Chronic despondency was a step towards that Stalag ailment all P.O.W.s colloquially termed as being "Wire Happy".

Arriving back inside our RAF compound it was inevitable that, barrack by barrack, we would be counted yet again, the same procedure was carried out throughout the other compounds. I often wondered, apart from an unhindered search of all the barrack blocks, what this exercise proved, and what the total count discrepancy was?. Either way, it was odds on that the Germans did not manage to strike a balance. I knew, along with many others, that quite a few "wanted" P.O.W.s were in hiding somewhere inside the Camp, supposedly in a secret hideaway known only to a select few. These Army lads on the run from the German authorities, were wanted for acts of sabotage carried out while on working parties, and other various illicit activities such as sexual intercourse with German women etc, all crimes in the eyes of the Germans, warranting civilian trials.

I have never quoted it personally, but I have heard it said that lightning never strikes twice, it certainly did as far as we in the RAF compound were concerned. The Germans obviously thought we RAF types were fair game, three months only had elapsed since the big camp search, for this time we HAD the distinct privilege of receiving a special visit from the district Gestapo. It was generally acknowledged that they had made the journey from Breslau, which was the nearest place of any great size. Quite a gang of these mean looking individuals arrived in our compound one fine morning, at first glance looking like a bunch of civilian sightseers, a truly false conception. The post war depictions of these morons ran true to pattern as they were with long leather coats, and trilby headgear. The ensuing search of all our RAF compound barracks followed the usual pattern. I and the rest of my comrades in hut 16 A were forcibly ejected outside to join the lads from the other seven huts, who at that moment were noisily congregating on the open ground in hut formations. That hardy annual, the unavoidable count of bodies, was undertaken by "Ukraine Joe", the burly Unteroffizier's usual job. It was obvious that the habitual prolonged waiting period would have to be endured whilst standing in barrack formations, blimey how bloody predictable these Deutschers proved to be. The customary cordon of armed guards from the German Vorlager kept us company while Himmler's boys ransacked our barrack huts, we knew they would be left in a chaotic state. However, we had an ace up our sleeve, unlike the previous big search, this visit was no surprise. Our Compound Leader had received advance information of this Gestapo venture, accordingly he had put all his barrack commanders in the picture. All the important items, which included our wireless set, and other illicit wares, were knowledgeably well hidden before the search commenced. The search tip off probably came from a Wehrmacht source in the German Vorlager, nevertheless I do not think it was made on our behalf. No doubt the real reason was to protect the name of the Wehrmacht, and save possible embarrassment i.e. possible finds in the search. The implication was obvious, the two factions did not get on very well with each other. In order to make the situation less obvious we had made certain that the Gestapo thugs would find one or two crystal sets which had been left adroitly but purposefully for them to discover.

"Ukraine Joe", our German Unteroffizier, was not pleased at the Gestapo's intrusion on his preserves, the expression of disapproval on his face revealed that fact. Although he was a ruthless type himself, lurking in the depths of his mind was a sneaking regard for his RAF "flieger", and although he chased us around relentlessly in a hostile manner, gun butt in hand, he did like outsiders butting in.

I have mentioned crystal sets, quite a few of these of these primitive receiving sets were assembled by several of the lads, and were always in constant use. We were never without the BBC news, and the bulletins were read out nightly in each barrack hut. The location of the pukka wireless set was known only to a select few who were responsible for the receiving and compilation of the news bulletins to be read out in the huts. Spare parts for this set were always obtainable by devious methods, to be smuggled into the camp from outside sources i.e. working parties.

All the aforesaid happenings tended to liven up the tedium, and boredom of P.O.W. existence, the main idea was to avoid finishing up "wire happy", although a few kriegies did succumb to suffer distress, one or two even committed suicide.

In their endeavours to make life more pleasant our various organisers in the camp were always busy, and during the late summer of 43 soccer leagues, plus a small variety of other sporting activities were arranged to be enjoyed by participants and spectators alike. Diversely, during the pleasant summer evenings many inmates used the camp roads between the compounds for both exercise, and visiting other

compounds. During these jaunts one was always likely to be accompanied by the sound of martial music. The loudspeakers fixed on to the large wooden poles along the camp roads were constantly in use churning out German marchings songs, and at various times their own versions of the current war news, and typical propaganda, but nobody took much notice of that garble, except perhaps the Germans themselves.

One of the compounds, very adjacent to our block, which received a stream of regular visitors was the Convalescent compound, most of whose occupants, predominantly Army lads were suffering from after effects of different kinds of illnesses, and wounds.

Some were minus limbs, and almost all were unfit for further fighting service, some would not improve at all.

The majority of these men were not issued with ordinary Red Cross food parcels because of various dietary problems etc, instead they received special invalid parcels which contained items medically suitable for their conditions. During the late summer period it was strongly rumoured that some of these kriegies who had been strictly examined, and had satisfied the Medical boards of the Repatriation Commission would be going back home to the U.K. by the end of 1943, but no fixed date had been stipulated. Following weeks of anticipation one day it all came true, the suspense was at an end, and all those due for repatriation were assembled in a sudden fashion to be informed that they should make themselves ready for a more or less immediate departure. The news spread like wildfire throughout the Stalag, consequently nearly all the Repats were able to say their goodbyes to all mates, and friends, before finally leaving Lamsdorf. I understood they would be travelling by rail up to the Baltic coast to board a ship for Sweden, and thence to the U.K. Among those repatriated were several RAF lads, one of whom I knew fairly well, a Sergeant pilot who had been a contemporary of mine whilst serving on 106 Squadron during the year of 1941. He had a leg amputated at the knee after injuries suffered whilst baling out from his stricken Hampden bomber after being shot up.

During the latter part of 1943 Stalag 8B, Lamsdorf became grossly overcrowded with the camp population increasing by ^{several} thousands. The reason for this occurrence being the Italian Surrender to the Allies, and its aftermath. Apparently the Germans had moved in very swiftly, and decisively, when the Italians gave up the fight, to take over then briskly transfer great numbers of British P.O.W.'s who had previously been held in Italian camps. Although a number of kriegies managed to escape during the confusion of the German take over, the majority were taken over to be transported by rail northwards through the Brenner Pass into Germany. The Germans solved their accommodation problems by sharing out these unfortunate kriegies between various Stalags throughout Greater Germany, and Lamsdorf was designated as one of them.

Though strictly an RAF compound we had to accept our quota of these Army lads, and ~~hitherto~~ unused bottom bed position of our three tier set up was utilised for this purpose in all of our eight barrack huts. After they had moved in the average complement in each barrack room was then almost two hundred men, an increase of fifty, which meant that we were literally bursting at the seams. This situation lasted for a few months until the Army "lodgers" were eventually absorbed elsewhere in the camp, most of them would be sent out on different working parties.

These Army kriegies from Italy achieved fame by introducing a novel invention which was to revolutionise prisoner of War cooking as we knew it, a quick brew with this appliance was brought to the boil in very quick time. This device was popularly known as a "Blower", and was ingeniously made utilising old Red Cross food parcel tin cans. The "blower" had a near circular type grate attached to a fan enclosed in a box with a short tunnel. It was hand operated, and fan belt driven with either the use of string or leather laces. The fan rotated at speed causing a draught which was driven through the tunnel. The beauty of it all was the minimum of fuel needed to boil a pan or dixie, in fact a few bits of coal, wood, or cardboard sufficed.

That old cliché "necessity is the mother of invention" was certainly true in this case, and in no time at all Stalag "blowers" were in operation throughout the camp with kriegies, in their now familiar sleeping actions, winding away merrily in their respective compounds. Inevitably the big question on everybodys lips was "How had we survived up till then without a "Blower" .

My first winter "in the bag" was now well under way, and little did I realise how severe the Silesian winters would be with their sub zero temperatures together WITH the biting east winds blowing in from Russia, thus bringing all the snow. To ease the boredom we RAF bods had innumerable snowball fights with the "Dieppe" Canadian Army lads who resided in the compound just opposite to us, on the other side of a camp road. These thousand or so Canadians were shortly to move to another camp. As far as heating was concerned we had a small ration of coal "briquettes" (compressed coal dust) for our central stove, but the supply, small as it was, did not last very long. Bedboards were then used as fuel in times of crisis, but obviously we could not use many of these or else we would have no supports to lay on, a situation which would have been catastrophic. During the extreme cold weather bed was the warmest place, it follows therefore that "pit bashing" was one of the more favoured pastimes during the bleak winter months. Apart from the aforesaid, the most popular winter indoor game to while away the long days, and evenings of sheer boredom, and apathy was Bridge. Personally I had never before played this card game, but I had gained lots of experience during my active service days when I had indulged in many a "Solo" school. While at Lamsdorf I learned all the secrets of the game of Bridge by the art of observation, I stood behind numerous Bridge school players, and closely watched the proceedings for hours on end as the games progressed. Patiently I eventually learned all the pros, and cons, more especially the art of bidding before deciding the time to make my debut. Afterwards in common with the many other addicts I played the game for equivalent long periods to eventually become quite an expert, always managing to maintain an amicable relationship with my different partners, they were many who did not. Bridge sessions at Lamsdorf went on, and on, and the points in these marathon efforts added up literally into the thousands. If real money had been readily available in lieu of points, on paper some players would have no doubt made their fortunes. Very good players were in abundance throughout our compound so inevitably competitions were organized between our different barrack huts during those winter months. Ironically, I have not played a single game of Bridge since my kriegie days despite my liking for such a splendid, and by far the most enlightening card game. Christmas was now approaching fast, my first in Gefangenschaft, and the main topic of conversation amongst the barrack throng was the eagerly awaited Xmas food parcels. The old lags amongst us would reminisce once again, principally to impress the comparative new boys, which included me. These long term residents would ramble^{on} and laud to great heights the virtues of such a parcel. Pausing now and then to take a slight breath they would drool on, and continue to give an elaborate description of each item that had been part of the previous Red Cross Xmas food parcel. I absorbed all the information it gave me a pleasant feeling of anticipation. I should point out that the Xmas Red Cross food parcels were specially made up for the occasion, and sent off in time for issue just before Christmas Day. What would we have done without the Red Cross Organisation does not bear thinking about, as they did everything in their power to make P.O.W existence as pleasant as humanly possible, and from a truly thankful point of view the Xmas parcel deserves description in this narrative. The contents of the 1943 parcel were as follows.

One packet of Tea.(2 ozs) , One tin condensed milk (14 ozs), Bar Sugar(6 ozs, Xmas pudding (16 ozs), Tin of cheese (3 ozs), Chocolate biscuits.(8 ozs) Tin Bacon.(8 ozs), Bar of chocolate, (4 ozs). Xmas Cake, (12 ozs). Tin steak and veg,(16 ozs).Tin Beef,(16 ozs). Tin Salmon,(8 ozs). Egg flakes,(2 ozs).

On average one Xmas parcel per man was issued during the week before Christmas in lieu.,of course,of the normal parcel issue. There was no doubt that the issue of such a parcel was a great morale booster for all prisoners having to endure Christmas in captivity. I was one of the lucky ones,but for the majority of the Army lads in the camp it would be their fourth behind the wire. Apart from the special Xmas food parcel nothing else was different from the usual P.O.W. routine. By our standards the Xmas dinner was really something,and every combine "cook" really went to town with their various different menus. The Xmas meal was enjoyed at staggered intervals,everybody could not cook at the same time,amidst a general hubbub of vocal accompaniment,a pleasant kriegie day of all days with I would venture to say,the fullest stomach of the year.

The first two months of the new year of 1944 passed very slowly,and I never ventured very far from the protection of the barrack hut,due to the severe wintry weather with its constant subzero temperatures,and of course the inevitable snow. The main thing was to try,and keep warm if at all possible.

During the ultra long indoor periods it was very far from being quiet,there was always a constant babble of conversation when every topic was discussed,but very long sessions of Bridge were responsible for the passing of many of the hours. All obtainable books were eagerly read,and last but not least the always keenly anticipated letters from home continued to arrive at regular intervals,everything came to a full stop when the stentorian cry of "Mail Up" rang through the barrack hut.The first week of March 44 proved to be a lucky one for me,to begin with I received a chit to collect a parcel containing two hundred cigarettes sent from my home,a rare event for me. Amazingly on my 24th birthday,6th March I received another chit,this time I had to collect a personal parcel,which

under the auspices of the Red Cross Organisation,my parents could send only once every three months.Together with other personal items the parcel contained a few pounds of chocolate, a nice birthday present,it was my third parcel from home.

The personal parcels proved to be great propaganda on our behalf. The Germans examined the contents of all parcels,and must have been quite bewildered at the quantity,quality.and availability of the items enclosed,which as far as they were concerned were more or less unobtainable in wartime Germany. As far as cigarettes,and chocolate were concerned it was understandable that some of the guards took risks,and accepted bribes for either of these

commodities,consequently could be kept on the hook thereafter,more especially now that most front line soldiers had been replaced by base troops,amongst whom were a few Poles.

During the month of March we had another Typhus scare in the Stalag,and everybody in the camp had to undergo an F.F.I (free from infection) inspection,fortunately our Compound was found to be in the clear. The winter had proved to be very long one due to the extreme severity of the weather,and in fact it was still snowing very heavily during the last fortnight of March so our confinement to barracks continued with,once again,the card game of Bridge being well to the fore,roll on the summer was the general cry.

The early months of 1944 were only notable for one important ~~item~~ event, the sudden departure from our scene of the renowned "Ukraine Joe", Unteroffizier Kussell, to give him his official title. His disappearance to what we thought were active service duties was obviously pleasurable received by all the ~~occupants~~ occupants of our RAF compound. I did not know the whereabouts concerning his posting or in what capacity, although I am pretty sure it was not the Russian Front, I'll wager "Ukraine Joe" was glad too. I have mentioned previously that I had heard on the post war grapevine that he had subsequently become a P.O.W. under Allied jurisdiction, poetic justice I thought at the time. His replacement as N.C.O. in charge of our Compound was a much younger man, a bemedalled ex-front line soldier, who had been wounded during service on the Russian Front. This slightly built Wehrmacht Unteroffizier, who was always smartly attired complete with ski cap, and polished jack boots, had obviously seen plenty of action, his campaign medals together with his close combat badges adorning his tunic provided the visual evidence that this was so. It was soon evident that this new job was foreign to him compared with his previous accomplishments, for a time he did not know what to make of us RAF types, he had never come across a bunch like us before, and our antics presented a bit of a puzzle to this ex-front line veteran. Nevertheless, he learned very quickly, but as far as we were concerned there was no doubt he was a big improvement on his predecessor "Ukraine Joe", and he never at any time resorted to gun butt methods. He proved to be a big soccer fan, and was always to be seen as a spectator at the big weekend matches.