

December 23, we are moved into permanent barracks. What crowding. Bunks three decks high, two men per bunk. Wood slatted bottom, no mattress, no blankets. So we put one overcoat beneath us and one over us. The bunk is so narrow, we can only sleep on our sides, spoon fashion. We have lost so much weight that our bones protrude. I think we changed sides every 15 minutes when the pain of our protruding hip bones became too great. And there was no heat!

Many men, in order to conserve heat and strength, seem never to leave their bunks. Wes and I have decided that, to keep our morale up and to stay healthy, we will not bunk out during the day. I'd been up to the Library and drawn a couple of books: Physiology and German. And had enrolled in classes on Selling and German, if I remember correctly. Due to the cold, the classes had been discontinued for the time being. The daylight hours passed in reading, conversation and cooking. We hiked the compound perimeter daily.

Food, of course, was our deepest concern. Our rations from the Jerries were about as follows: Warm coffee first thing in the morning. We were never sure from what it was made. Many of us found it served well as warm water for morning washup and shaving. At noontime, more or less, we were issued a number of boiled potatoes. Quality and number variable. Later, our soup. This at III B was usually a dehydrated rutabaga soup, I think, with a few leaves thrown in. I always considered the floating maggots an extra bonus - extra protein. Finally, our bread ration. A two-kilo loaf of black bread to be divided between four to eight men, depending on circumstances. This might be accompanied by a morsel of sausage, jam (beet), or grease, or cheese. These were all

meticulously divided among each group. I wonder where cutting instruments came from.

At some point, we were all issued a "Dixie." It was a small steel kettle, holding about a quart, with a wire handle. Most of us had our spoon (GI) which we normally carried in our leggings. Upon arrival at III B we were all issued bath towels, toilet articles, socks, and overcoats. I got a good French one, well fitting, heavy, with many pockets.

Wes and I "mucked" together. That is, we shared our RC parcels and cooked together. Each RC parcel contains five packs of cigarets. We smoke 3 and use two to buy a coal briquette (size of a brick), flour, etc. We must also use our pooled cigarets to rent "blower" time for cooking. My diary has many comments on cooking, which became a good time-killer.

Blowers were made from tin cans from the RC parcel and one dixie for the firepot. Bed boards served as base and side boards. It was essentially akin to a blacksmith's forge fan. A series of large and small pulleys ran a paddle wheel fan, enclosed in a larger Klim can, at high speed, which forced air up thru the perforated bottom of the dixie. This produced a quick, hot fire made from shavings (off bed boards) and coal bits. Curiously, we found at III A that the British used the same principle for their blowers, except they used a propeller arrangement directly under their pot. It always amazed me what could be made from cans, a jackknife (smuggled in), scissors (smuggled in) and a few nails (pulled from bed frames).

Our housing at III B was a long, low, brick barracks. My guess would be forty feet wide by 150 feet long. It was divided into three parts, each end consisted of a long, low sleeping/living area, two-thirds of which was a mass of three-story bunkbeds. The lower bunks of earlier owners had been enclosed in cardboard from Red Cross boxes in hope of some retaining warmth. Three

German stoves of brick had been cut down and topped with sheet steel (black market bought with our cigarets). The Germans issued us a box of coal-brown powder, unburnable, per week. Again, wood and coal briquettes were bought for cooking and heat. The steel top was too small for all who wished to cook, so the blowers were really necessary for our cooking. In the living areas were a number of trestle tables and benches. Windows on each side, which were shuttered at night, provided dim daylight, augmented by two or three dim bulbs hanging from the ceiling.

Between the two living ends was a washroom with wash troughs. Next was a small room which might have been meant to be a kitchen. It was entirely empty except for a fireplace at one end. We used this during inclement weather to carry out the smoke of our blower. A many holed latrine was across the parade ground. I think a barrel was located near the door for night emergency use.

It really was cold, dreary, crowded living. Some entertainment was available. A wind-up Victrola with a few well-worn records was circulated through the barracks. On occasion, some singing or instrumental musicians might come thru. Almost every evening, the day's news would be read to us. Prior to its commencement, the barracks would be checked for guards and then the doors locked to prevent interruption by Germans.

We had been watching, listening for the approach of the Russians for several days. The last day of January, we received orders to evacuate the camp. It was not unexpected and some preparations had already been made. I had stitched together our large bath towels to make a bag with a long handle to hang it over my shoulder. We took bed boards to make a sled, as many others were doing. Our few possessions, Red Cross boxes, were tied on. Late afternoon, we fell out, were counted, and began our march about 6:30 PM.

We moved slowly, strung out for miles. At the front end, the older kiegies hauled sleds of bedboards piled high with possessions, carrying blowers and blanket rolls. We also started with a sled with a Red Cross box or two, but it soon broke and came apart. So we carried our boxes and ate therefrom immediately.

The march that night was horrendous. German troops stood or marched toward Furstenburg. We straggled away from there. They were headed into battle, the sights and sounds of which we could see and hear. Occasionally, a shell would explode in the near distance. Our guards trudged along on either side. Elderly Volksturm. The one on the right thru the deep snow of the verge. He really suffered.

We slipped, slid, stumbled and fell on the pitted, rutted, slick, icy road. Cans, blankets, boxes, blowers, sled parts invisible littered the road. We crawled along, a great, long, wounded snake.

I feel Wes and I were more fortunate than many. Our health was good, had well-fitting shoes, though we had lost weight, our strength was still up. Activity and good habits paid off. We soon learned that if we wanted to take a break, we could move up thru the column, drop out to the side and pick up the rear. Far behind dragged the sick, ailing and footsore. We saw a horse-drawn wagon there loaded with the worst off.

We soon realized that a golden opportunity existed for us in the cast-offs from the front of the column. A couple of good German blankets (we had none) were found lying by the roadside. We rolled them into a long banana, tied the ends together and looped them over a shoulder. Sometime later, a Klim can of flour was added to our collection. Then an exquisitely-made, undamaged blower lay by the roadside. Maybe we used the drawstring from our field jacket. Anyway, we tied a cord on it and brought it to Ill A where it was perhaps the only one!

After a few hours, the poor old Volksturm guard of our barracks group began to play out. We could hear him moaning as he plowed thru the snow. His pack, rations, bag, canteen, ammo belt, even his rifle was distributed among us. I don't recall if I carried a portion. I suppose his pack went on a sled. Maybe later, the guard's impediments went on the following wagon.

Some time about noon, after marching all night, the column began to fall out en masse. We thought we had "hit the wall!" The entire line of men fell out in the snow, ate whatever we had and refused to get back on the road. The weather had turned warm, the icy road began to thaw and open up and we didn't feel we would freeze to death.

After about a half hour's shouting and threatening us, the guards brought out the horses. German soldiers riding massed horses came down the verges. Three choices: Stay where you were and get trampled by horses' hooves, turn from the horses away from the road and get shot, or resume the march. It was then that I realized that the body could do whatever the mind demanded of it. So on and on we dragged.

As we marched, I had observed long mounds in the fields covered with earth. Potatoes, rutabagas? No one knew what they were and no one dared leave the road to find out. Dusk we were turned out into a barn filled with damp

straw. Behind the barn was a long earth-covered mound. A guard stood at the front door, none at the back, so I made a lone recon: potatoes. Filled my pockets, shirt, etc. and returned. One had only to dig thru a couple inches of earth and straw to reach them. I have no idea how many others took advantage of the opportunity. Only the luck of having a farm-born father who mounded up root crops brought a few of us extra food.

We had covered nearly 50 Km. those first 24 hours. Wes and I boiled up some potatoes for breakfast. We left, footsore and weary, for another day's march, a mere 20 km. With food to cook and cooking facilities, we learned to gain time for that by moving up thru the column and joining the rear.