

STALAG. 344 E.769

The Long March

A diary kept by Frederick Potterton

January

On the 21st Jan. 1945 we were ordered to pack, (1 parcel) tin meat 4 days bread and an invalid parcel.

22nd. Went to work no one there so came back again good soup order to move at 4.30. Started marched all night 30 kilos. to G1000 Nimbsdorf.

23rd. Day of rest soup only.

24th. A little bread fairly good billets put on extra clothes opened up the invalid parcel had porridge played rummy. Guns very close.

25th. Started 7.30 very cold 22 kilos to Schonau split up in lots stayed at a farm had spuds and tin of meat 1 between 5 poor billet outhouse no lights for 4 days now.

26th. 7am start 25 kilos to a small farm turned out of cow-house and went in loft found a sack of peas and some meal 1 tin of meat between 5 (Neustradt)

27th. Marched 15 kilos to Liegenals had a fire and cooked peas and potatoes a kid gave us some bread and the flak gave me a fag and Wink got some eggs had a lovely billet in a stable horses in it but electric light came on in middle of night.

28th. Marched 30 kilos to Wiedenau old woman shouted hell at us for having a fire terrible billet in loft but plenty of spuds. John pinched a sausage.

29th. Rest day stood up in cow-house all day had biscuits spuds and soup.

30th. Went on to Riechenstein 33 kilos. Porridge at night. HOT WATER

31st. Porridge issue day and 1 tin meat between 5. Marched 28 miles to Marsdorf dominion farm good billet old man gave me some pudding bought some bread stogged up all day met Stan Woodman had soup and 2 spuds.

February

1st Feb. Rest day bread issue 1 slice a man, buck shee pea soup from the cooks lovely.

2nd. Marched 30 kilos to Kamnigt good billet bag of spuds and lovely soup Jock Krank had Winks and Jaffys couldn't eat it Jock slept with guards.

3rd. Marched 20 kilos to Otterndorf boiled peas not bad sleeping place spuds and some soup.

4th. Rest day had peas bit of porridge and soup.

5th. Marched 7 kilos to Weshendorf lovely billet got spuds and soup coffee with milk and sugar.

6th. Rest day Women at farm gave us bread spuds and coffee fed us a treat.

7th. Same again 300 grams bread from Jerry and a little meat and meal barley and apple.

8th. Same again a bit of bread from the women mashed spuds plenty of porridge and spuds.

9th. Moved to Merkeldorf 25 kilos good meal before we left. Good lighting John got split from us got some spuds and soup.

10th. Did 15 kilos to Albonorf bad billet got a bit of swede and soup no spuds or bread.

11th. Got a bit more swede cooked it stayed in bed all day had soup no spuds again.

12th. Marched 18 kilos to Ahtenbuch saw E. 3. and Jake got some spuds and soup fair billet.

13th. Marched 20 kilos crossed the Czech border 12.0am snowing hard very bad going cold. Czech people much better gave bread apples and fags to us on the way by.

SKISTA

Good billet dance room crowded back sheesh bread soup and coffee didn't click ourselves.

14th. Last night we received just over 300 grams of bread from Jerry spuds and soup. This morning the people sent 4 X 3 kilo loaves up between 160 men. 1 small slice each expect the jerry issue will have to last the rest of the march at present no one knows where we are going Stalag are still in front of us maybe we will join them presently am not doing so well beginning to weaken. Passed the border again but went back later. Have a wonderful reception from the people stacks of bread white and brown but got swindled by our own. Sergeants rotten- all of them eats a soup from the civies where we were not bad billets. But very cold in barn. Marched 22 kilos to Soberas saw an American bomber crash in flames. Heard alarm sound in the distance most likely the nearest town which is Gitseuin arrived at 1.45 pm. The roads were 3-4 inches of slush everywhere am wet through have no more socks left 30 of us are thinking of doing a flit but can't make up our minds where to go.

15th. Another very eventful day we rest and eat all day never since being a P.O.W have I been treated so well cannot give in detail all the food but finished the day with shepherds pie coffee with milk and sugar grand. Billets rather cold Jock and John are ready for their bunk I have backed out to stay with Wink and hardly think its worth the risk the war must end in 3 weeks.

16th. Left the billets at 6.45 after a good bowl of soup from the civis and marched 15 kilos to Samochin to an empty farm got some real hot bread too moreish also got some apples billets crowded none too good Jock and John stayed behind sorry I didn't after this.

17th. Left at 7.30 got coffee 5 more men missing F.W says we are to have no more food from the civis and 1lb of spuds a day we arrived at this place 12 o'clock the guard wouldn't let us have anything at first but changed and the civis brought some lovely soup and a large slice of bread also 2 helps of spuds the distance today was 25 kilos with only one rest rushing things a bit.

18th Sunday. Guards got us up at 5.30 and at 6 told us we were staying went back to bed very cold rations jam sugar and meat had spuds at 11.0 am missing cigs a bit but getting used to it.

19th. 4 weeks have been marching. Got up at 5.30 had coffee and moved at 7.30 marched on good roads crossed the Czech border into Sudetenland notice the difference no police to keep the people back from giving us food no bread. Stopped at Neider Gruppai distance 20 kilos fairly good billets was cook for 58 men got plenty of food and did business got some eggs apples and cakes sent also a K.G.F coffee with milk.

20th. Got up at 6am made coffee very good hot soup and spuds marched 22 kilos to Reichstadr. Br awful (?) billet no spuds or anything else at first because 2 more men have bunked making over 20. Very nice day sun lovely but very cold. By Niemais.

21st. Got up at 7am had some coffee very cold day but glad o be moving hope the guards will peg out. Marched away at 9.30 passed through a large industrial town Neimis went on 20 more kilos to Neider Lieblich. 80 in a farm could be better but at least we had some spuds. The wars must be ending for we had jam sugar and something to make the soup of. Old woman gave us some turnips the guard told me we are going somewhere in Saxony. I hope the march will soon be over.

22nd. Moved off at 8.30 under the impression we were only going 15 kilos it started to snow was very hard going passed through Auschau fairly large town.
This march was the hardest and longest we have had as well as the first time we have been 4 days without a rest. Journey finished at distance of 40 kilos at 6.30 got some coffee and 1 pint of watery soup at midnight terrible billet the very worst we have had no straw very cold no light no nothing.
KLEIN PRIESEN

23rd. Left billet at 8.30 got no coffee or anything else weather not so cold but road very hardgoing. We passed through a large industrial town of Ausig. Alarm on while we were there but nothing happened did a distance of 20 kilos to Auschin not bad billets 100 in a barn a bit better than yesterday had coffee and marg and bread they are getting too generous with their bread but they won't give us spuds as well how I hope we are on the march with those guards when the war ends but don't expect to be so lucky. No light again tonight.

24th. Left the barn at 10am got a boiling of spuds just before we left bought it for 4 bars of soap but then could not enjoy it in all of a bustle very bad raining and snowing like- bad roads went 15 kilos to a village on the outskirts of Tiepnirg, very large industrial town billet in dance hall had soup very poor dried egg marg issue 1 between 10 288 men now.

PR OBSTAU

25th Sunday. 6 weeks today we have been marching have just been told we are going to BRUX not far from here. Today is a rest day we have no grub but a dry billet would rather be moving we might get something to eat at a farm have tried raw spuds for breakfast but are not up to much. The floor is hard to sleep on am thoroughly fed up. Up to date we have had 16 days bread since we left. We have just had a surprise an invalid parcel. 1 between 8 a good parcel thrown away everything in it was patent drinks and we had no fires. Put it all in a bowl and eat it sheer waste but no option.

26th. Raining hard but not so cold had coffee with sand. Nothing to eat again today am getting weaker and having blackouts. Marched 18 kilos to Osseg. Gale blowing. All in one barn very warm sleep about 10 ton of spuds in the barn so peeled 12 milk churns full but still the soup was like water took 8 hrs to cook and then was burnt.

27th. Very fine rain and bad roads we passed through BRUX had a hell of a bashing with bombs. Guards are very bad tempered distance of 28 kilos. All in one billet big barn got some spuds half-cooked but eat them dirt and all (Place Neudorf)

28th. Staying put in this place ration of marg 1-10 eat it straight away no bread. Not to cold trying to get spuds cooked at the cookhouse. Plenty of rumours flying about where we are going.

March

March 1st. Left at 9.30 passed through a large town Komstau. March 28 kilos to Weitrizt am on my knees now bad billet no vessel for cooking poor lookout for grub fair porridge.

2nd. Snowing a little, cold. Left at 9 got coffee. Marched 14 kilos to Roschwitz saw stacks of Yankee bombers. Not bad billet 100 men pinched the spuds from the pig boiler. Plenty of them. Bread issue Stalag loaf between 5 marg 1-12.

3rd. Very bad day. Cold. Snowing pretty bad roads bad everywhere. Marched 34 kilos to G. Fell the very worst billets we have had soup in tins (?) lots not bad. Marge 1-12. Frozen all night.

4th. 6 weeks marching today. Not much longer we hope rest day coffee bread issue 1-5 not bad soup.

5th. Left the billet at 7.45 marched 25 kilos no billets ready stood on road 2 hrs snowing hard roads but saw more Yankee planes over heard guns in the distance poor billets 80 men and nowhere to cook anything. (Wintergreen)

6th. Moved off 7.0 marched 14 kilo to Falkenau in the cellar of a pub very cold all in one billet right in the town may be some bread we don't know yet. Boot inspection for repairs officer said Boots parcels and socks on the way. Bread 1 Stalag loaf between 7 soup at 10.20 pm. Very good 3 men short. Pinched some raw spuds not bad.

7th. Rest day and what a day. Cold and nothing at all to eat won't even give us a drop of water for a drink rumours floating around about parcels. Oh what a night raided the pub store 1 hr later the guards raided us and bashed up a good many some very bad they got all the stuff back.

8th. Moved off at 9.0. Went 14 kilos to Konisburgh bad billet out in field good soup but cold.

9th. Rest day very weak no grub no rations promise of bread and 1 cig a man, raided a spud damp at midnight.

10th. Red letter day. Uncertain about moving guard said bread and a parcel in the town 1 hr later stuff arrived Yankee Belgian & French 2 or 3 kinds Canadian medicine issue 1 each. Cigs with all 140 in most we got 1 Canadian 1 French and on top of this 1 loaf for 4 lovely. We then march 15 kilos and are dead beat with extra weight are just outside Eyet good billet no light.

11th. Rest day very good got some spuds from the farmer for soup we had big feed cake eggs hoc everything feeling very sick.

12th. Another rest day don't know why weather not bad slept bad last night. Rumours of a bread issue. 7 weeks marching now.

13th. Moved at 9 marched 14 kilos just a nice move fairly good billet electric light good soup bread issue 1-4 parcel just about finished sugar issue extra spuds. Indigestion very bad through the night.

14th. Moved again at 9.0 marched 15 kilos to Roslau all factorys lovely day.

15th. Rest day glorious weather hair cut shower and wash very good.

16th. Bread issue 2-5 moved at 9 and marched 10 kilos to Wiessen Stadt grand weather bad billet machine shop allowed a fire good stodge puddings poor rations 3 spuds a man thats all.

17th. Moved at 7. Marched 10 kilos to Gefrees all in one barn 2 good soups plenty of rumours about parcels and a train good billet.

18. Moved at 8 marched 20 kilos went under the Autobahn not all that good. (Ramsenthal) cooking done for use fairly good billets supposed to be the last for the march close to Bayreuth still rumours of parcels and bread good soup.

19th. Rest day soud issue a few extra. Bread issue 2-5 all of it bad. Bought spuds and got them cooked. Wink got a bit of bread still rumours of parcels begun our 8 weeks march nice weather heavy raids in the distance some of the lads working for extra grub. Wink is much better but has been very bad. Parcel quite finished cigs very low.

20th. Rest day good soup made straw cake deadly but eat it. Still plenty of rumours about bread and parcels also the train journey may not come. Browned off with everything.

21st. Very nice weather seems as though we may be staying the day no news up till 9am. Wishing someone would come in with some grub. 4pm Have just heard that parcels have arrived and are being unloaded may get them today am getting very weak.

22nd. Should get the parcels today Sgt has gone for them have been told we leave on Sat morning by train at 6am in open trucks should be bread today Received parcels 1-2 English 1-10 Invalid biscuits and jam very good. 100 cigs.

23rd. Another rest day the move has been put off again we have has some Red X food French biscuits and jam bread cheese 1-3.

24th. Rest day again. Parcels at station get one each when we leave don't know when that will be at the rate things are moving. Bread 1-6.

Sun 25th. Told we are moving at 4 everyone packed up.

26th. Move cancelled everyone disappointed and stay in bed. No parcels no bread again poor rations can't get any grub anywhere deadly.

27th. Roused at 6 am and told we are moving moved off at 9 to the station received parcels 2 Yankee 3 English between 5 train left at 2 Bread 1-3 NURENBURG

28th. Stayed in train all night 70 in 1 truck moved at 11.0 marched to Stalag XII D. No organisation in compound with Russians very very bad. 70 kilos journeys and we hope. Total distance marched. 825 kilos.

29th. Went for delousing at 10am. Received bread 1-7 and marg. Were there until 5.30. Went into new compound 250 in a tent very poor sleeping on the ground soup deadly stuff.

30th. Rest day. Bread 1-7 and parcels 1-2 English war news marvellous. Parcels North Row 50 cigs.

31st. Rest day. Made tin fire place and had our first raw spud issue. The war news is still very good. Bread 1-7. Marg. Wink pretty bad am feeling very well myself. Just waiting for the end. Weather not so good plenty of air raid alarms.

April

Saturday 1st April 1945.

Registration name and no. only. Better weather today quite a bit of aircraft about. Told we leave again in the morning.

2nd. Rev. 4am. Fall in at 5 and marched off once again received ½ parcel at the gate nominal roll call which took 3 hrs. Moved off and were surprised to get transport 55 in a truck and a 2 hrs journey dull day. Fire alarm while waiting fed up put clocks on an hour. Last night news was still very good we are supposed to be moving towards the front line where the Gen. Pattons forces are moved about 30 kilos and stopped Baiter -Caich American fighter planes came over moved back into the wood beside a German troop train went and stayed 8 hrs. The engine then changed ends and we arrived back in Stalag at 12 pm. No Rations.

3rd. Received yesterday's rations 1-7 todays 1-14. With sugar everyone on about moving again at night the rumour was stronger was issued with bulk sugar 1 parcel American Wink had an English.

4th. Still rumours about moving but N.C.C's only now ferry all the packed up ready to go no rations and don't look like getting them our forces are supposed to be pretty close to use plenty of gun fire proper shake on all round don't know what is happening.

5th. Given out last night we are moving this morning but only the D.V's went very heavy raid on Nurnbergh direct hits on railway and ammunition dump fighter planes over all day. No bread ration they say we are to get no more brad things are looking black on the grub line.

6th. Jerry came in for 400 men to work on the bomb damage no one would go so guard marched away again should be parcels today but looks doubtful rained all night no news yet.

7th. Nothing happened of any interest.

8th. Order to pack and move into the old Yank compound went away at 3.0 first in the tent and got bed boards hell of a mess but better than the last place.

9th. Normal day up toll 12. We got soup and 18 to share loaf and 1 parcel between 4 not bad also Red X soup rumours of another parcel tomorrow. News still good.

10th. Lovely weather but no news about anything at 10am. Planes over as usual parcels supposed to have come in last night all 1,000 ferried left here. Compound put in quarantine to stop us moving still get a bit of grub but no bread or biscuits to go with it date on the loaf we have just had Dec 1st.

11th. Still very nice weather no parcel news honey marg salt and spuds today wonder if we shall get a parcel. News still good can't be much longer now. Very heavy raid on the railway never seen so many planes before.

12th. Roosevelt died 63 years old. Weather not so good and no parcels again, some bread but burnt 1-8. News is better we must get released or the war will end soon, parcels tomorrow but damaged.

Fri. 13th. Raining hard news better. Still no parcels may not get them today after all, no bread. Parcel issue. 1 damaged English, 1 Yank between 2. Wink & I had 1 in fine condition, then the upheaval started ordered to move in 1 hr. Talk about earthquake we hung on and cooked beans in the cookhouse and had a decent meal of bully and mashed spuds at 10.0. Jerry decided he only wanted 1,300 men so back to bed and told we were moving at 5am but would be told at 12 whether or no.

14th. No orders yet but we want to know how we stand about parcels as there are plenty in if we can get hold of them. Orders to move again. 1 parcel a man marched off at 7.0 18 kilos. Arrived at 1.0. Quite a bit of back-sheesh when the cooks had unloaded the wagon.

Sun. 15th. Rest all day and marched off at 6.0pm 30 kilos worst march ever been everyone dead bead arrived at 6am dropping out everywhere terrible.

16th. Rest day grub and decent billet.

17th. Waiting to try and get a ride from Jerry. No boots. I have got a ride very good day all round plenty of business.

18th. Moved last night on the wagon better than marching did 25 kilos. Gun fire all round arrived at Lowenbrauk at 5am. Rested Wed night.

19th. Moved off at 7.0 in small wagon good going 16 kilos into a state farm arriving at 12.0.

20th. Rest all day counted 441 bombers go over. Bread at last 1 between 14. Some food of our own. Friday night moving off at 6.30 going a short cut hope it will be a rest day also might get a Red X issue from a nearby officers camp lovely weather distance 16 kilos.

Sat 21st. Ret day but orders to move out at 9. Marched off raining hard were told we had 8 kilos to do finished up doing 18 arrived at 5.

22nd. Sleep all day moved off at 7pm, marched 22 kilos, Arrived at 2am. No bread.

23rd. Sleep until 12.0. Raining all day no march tonight very good news local Volksturm turn out.

24th. Rise 7. Breakfast of rice. Still no bread. Got ready to move order cancelled.

25th. Marched off at 09.00. Did 80 kilos to a village getting W.K.C.

April 29th 1945. Released by the Yanks at 8.30. Got a wagon and did 90 kilos the first day 180 the second.

F. B. Potterton.