

“The March – January to March 1945”

Called the Black March, Bread March, or Death March

Captain D.W. Clare’s diary notes from January 23 to February 21, 1945

Tuesday, Jan. 23/45 Distance walked 23 km.

Up at 5 A.M; Jim (my orderly) and I loaded the sleigh: by 8.30 A.M. were out the gate of the camp where we were issued – 1 Red Cross parcel, 1/2 loaf of bread, margarine. I had received from the officers remaining in camp about 300 gm of tea, one tin powdered cocoa and milk. some sugar and 2 small packages of raisins. 12 Noon, rest for lunch. Previous parties, already discarding kit along road.

The roads were good except last kms we had deep snow. At 5-30 arrived at Dominion at Friewalde, dusk, crowded old vegetable barn.

At.8:30 p.m. I found Capt. Davison in a barn with 88 sick.

Wed. Jan. 24 (1945) Distance 25 km

Up at 6.15 (a.m.) Had 68 sick. Left 9:30 a.m. At noon one man fainted and was sent back to Friewalde. Road good. sleigh worked well. 6 P.M. at Prieborn, in horse barn;

Saw 5 padres from another camp, cooked hot meals, rats in straw. I had Synovitis of left Achilles Tendons. No food issue.

Thurs. Jan 25 (1945) Distance 30 km

Up at 7 AM march out 9 AM. Issued bread (civilian loaf) 1/5 each. Load on sleigh came loose, one runner came off. Hard going all morning; leg painful - 5 PM had vegetable soup at Fabric In Munsterburg.

Long march up hills, then through snow. It took one hour to go 1 km. At 10 PM arrived at barn; Met Capt Tattersal and padres from another group. Everything full; party split in two groups between Altburwalds and Alt.Aldemodorf; completely tired; supper – tea - bread and meat.

Fri. Jan 26 (1945) Distance 23-25 km

Up at 8 A.M. Wash & shave in kitchen of house; dried socks by fire; hot coffee and apples in house; Jimmy (Sanitator) fixed barrel hoops for sleigh runners. Capt. Tattersal and I did dressings in morning,

One padre in poor condition, we dressed his feet and he had influenza; gunfire seemed closer. Marched off at noon. Through Frankenstein; putting up road blocks of trees at edge of town.

Arrived at Olbersdorf; slept in ballroom of large house. Had put kit bag on wagon, did not arrive; No blankets for night.

Sat. Jan-27 (1945) Distance 21 km

Left at 9:30 (am); 3 M.O.'s walked together as groups were all together. Went through Reichenbach to Neudorf; Lunch – biscuits and cheese. Heavy transport on road.

Three groups were at a large farm (Dominion); eleven of us in a small kitchens slept on straw, had radio news. We had 2 hours of sick parade in kitchen while boys cooked. Kit arrived with wagon. One M.O. lost his blankets. I lost cigarettes, chocolate and socks.

From 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. some men got soup. Sanitator's feet very bad, no bread issue; gave bread and biscuits to man who had his food parcel stolen.

Sun Jan 28 (1945) Distance 24 km

Tea and bread; 40 sick; went through Sweidnitz; being evacuated; roads jammed with evacuees.

Had soup from train kitchen. Went on to Alt. Juarnich; everything full; went on 6 km across open moor; 40-50 cm snow. Dreary road, cold, to barn with no roof; no water; Sat by fire all night, very cold; much frost bites; one man had boots stolen in night.

Mon. Jan.29 (1945) Distance 29 km

Marched back to Alt Juarnich; arrived at 11:15 a.m. One party had soup early. The sick started to walk 11 kilos but returned, I stayed with Major McLarty (M. O.) while his group had soup and used forge in Dominion to fix sleigh; One New Zealander was blinded by smoke from previous night.

Started at 2 p.m.; Issued 1/10 loaf of bread at mill. Walked in blizzard and snowdrifts through Streigau to Rhonstock to Dominion at Barhof. I pulled sleigh most of the day as Jimmy (Sanitator)(orderly) was ill. After night march through blizzard arrived at 9 p.m.

I slept in stable with padres and sick; 22 sick arrived on wagon for the night.

Tuesday. Jan 30 (1945) Rest Day

Had shave and wash in the open; had sick parade for 2 1/2 hours in morning and 2 1/2 hours in afternoon; blistered feet and frostbite. Night was noisy and crowded; food poor; no fires allowed for cooking. Had issue of bread 1 loaf to 4 men, soup, oatmeal (Halbel flocken).

Wed. Jan. (1945) Distance 22 km.

Up at 6 a.m. Tea. 1 slice bread. Left at 8:15 a.m. Weather mild, snowing. Roads very hard walking; gunfire to the north. Made good time to Jauer where road blocks were under way. Passed circus with wagons stuck in the snow; very slow, deep snow, turned west and gun fire decreased.

About 1500 hours were at Kuchau. Billets good; slept in Kindergarten on stretchers for children. Told this was home area of Baron Von Richtofen. Had Halbelflocken

soup, potatoes, glass of wine and cherries. Did sick parade in barns and dressed 2 hands in our billets. Ashes from previous groups still warm. Joined by 6 NCO's (Non Commissioned officers) from previous party. One man run over by-wagon. Traded for dry oatmeal (Halbelflocken), tin meat, salt.

Thurs. Feb.1. (1945) Distance 12 km.

Breakfast - oatmeal porridge, bread, cocoa and cherries. Meat for sandwich on march. Left at 0900 hours, roads soft, snow melting; sleighs were being abandoned. Ours left behind 3 km from Goldberg.

Road blocks being built, sunny, clear day. Arrived at Dominion 1 km east of Goldberg; stayed upstairs in Polish kitchen. Had tea.

From 15.30 hours to 17.30 hours had sick parade of 31 men from Air Force group; 8 men from Breslau group. Issue - 1 loaf of bread for 10 men, thin soup. Poles gave us mashed potatoes. All the local families came to see the doctor.

Slept on straw on floor. Supper - potatoes and milk.

Fri. Feb 2. (1945) Distance 10 km.

Up at 0600 hours. Tea and bread; 39 sick. Issue – 1/5 loaf; Left at 09:30; all sleighs gone. Carried packs 10 km to Pilgramsdorf. Mens' accommodation poor, no water; Postens (guards) kicked out all the fires. We had billets in Kindergarten; young school teacher. Had sick parade 14.30 to 15.45.

Bought loaf of breads, jug of milk and 2 rye loaves. Teacher gave us potatoes and had an electric heater so we had tea and toast. Slept on straw in room. Issue of potatoes to some men. Had potatoes, bread, tea for supper.

Sat. Feb. 3 (1945) Distance 33 km.

Up at 0600. Cocoa and toast. Issue- bread 2/5 loaf; 32 sick on lorry.

Started at 0800 hours; our kit was cut down; all our blankets were on postens's (guards) wagon. Had blister by noon; had drink of buttermilk. It was hard going uphill through Lowenberg. Had ride on ration wagon for last 4-5 km.

Stopped at Gasthaus for coffee and bread; had beer from postens (guards). Helped, push wagon up a hill. At Welderdorf, Capt Tattersal and party stayed in village. Our party went on 2 km to poor barns. We had billets in a machine shed on straw. Ate in hallway. Issue - soup and 3 potatoes. Bought loaf and apples from house. Held sick parade in horse stable. It was raining, muddy; Men wet and tired.

Sun. Feb. 4. (1945) Distance 25 km.

Breakfast - oatmeal porridge, bread, tea. Issue - one loaf to 10 men.

Had sick parade in lean-to shed. Left 34 sick for wagons on road at 09.30 hours. Very slow going; lunch at Lauban. Went through Lichtenau; no room. Went further 8 km to Schloss Heildesdorf. Passed large group of Jewish prisoners on road. One man fainted and helped him in last 4 km. I always stayed at the back of the column to protect and help the stragglers. Sent 33 men on lorry to Gorlitz.

Spent night in castle. Had spring bed - 4 in a bed - hot and uncomfortable. Supper - potato soup from houses bread, tea. Men had barley soup. Had wash and shave. Started with nausea and dysentery.

Mon. Feb.5 (1945)

Up at 0800 hours. Had porridge tea and bread. Sick parade for one hour. Issue - pea soup one loaf bread to 4 men. Left at 12.30; put 15 sick on wagon. Arrived at Gorlitz-Mays at 16.30 hours (Stalag VIIIIC). Got kit from wagon. Met Capt Tony Stallard in front of Revier (from Lamsdorf) and Capt. Gibbons (Lamsdorf) who had accompanied a group to Switzerland for repatriation, had arrived back at this camp. So 5 of the 6 doctors that walked from Stalag 344 had arrived at VIIIIC

Tue Feb. 6 (1945)

Rested. Took Sulfa-guanidine for dysentery.

Wed. Feb. 7 (1945)

In morning went to lager to see men. In the afternoon began work in the Medical Inspection room. Worked 14.00 to 17.30 hours. Checked sick from Sweidnitz.

Thurs. Feb. 8 (1945)

Rested in morning. Word of further move. Capt. Tattersal was supposed to go to the French Lazarette. Had sick parade in the afternoon.

Fri. Feb. 9 (1945)

Morning was free. Sick parade in afternoon. At night told that Capt. Gibbons and I were to go to the Lazarette, packed.

Sat. Feb. 10 (1945)

Lazarette move cancelled. Major McLarty and Capt. Gibbons were marched out with 3,000 men from Lamsdorf. At 12.30 I was sent to the French Lazarette which had 5 French doctors. Had small room, a fire and a bath.

Sun. Feb. 11 (1945)

Had hot chocolate and white roll from French. Made hospital rounds.

Had all English speaking patients moved to one barracks. Had 2 French orderlies in the barracks. An Australian sergeant was the interpreter.

Cases mainly frost bite and pneumonias. Private Tyler had gun-shot wound left arm, infected, amputated, given penicillin 19,000 units daily.

My first use of penicillin. He seemed improved.

Mon. Feb. 12 (1945)

Hot chocolate. Rounds In A.M. Arranged wards by type of infection checked medical stores checked the pneumonias till 1800 hours. Had supper with French doctors.

Read for an hour.

Tues. Feb. 13 (1945)

Chocolate and bread. Rounds at 10.00 am and from 14.00 - 18.00 hours.

Checked histories and worked in barracks. We received medical supplies from camp hospital in Gros Strehlitz. Sgt. Vertrauensman had been on march 24 days. Sent to Stalag for my personal kit. Had abscess on my right ankle.

Wed. Feb.14 (1945)

Chocolate. Word from Stalag that all well people were to march. Lazarette lists were prepared and all English-speaking were to go by train. Prepared lists of walking, sitting and lying cases after dinner.

There were air-raids and bombing. Saw all English and American patients in Lazarette. One American severe religious mania, had to be left in hospital, later.

Thurs. Feb. 15 (1945)

Tea and bread. No ward rounds. Capt. Tattersal and 1,000 English, Canadian and American left camp.

Transferred sick from camp to Lazarette. Word that extra personnel were to leave hospital Thursday night or Friday. That night word that English-speaking were to go by train, French to stay.

Fri. Feb. 16 (1945)

0600 hours everyone roused. Orderlies preparing to leave. At 0800 hours in ward. had coffee and toast with orderlies. At 09.30 two officers and sanitators left. Work went on in barracks. Sound of artillery in distance. Afternoon quiet. Had bath and bed.

Sat. Feb. 17 (1945)

Rounds at 10.0, Patients well. At noon word of move by train. All walking cases packed and at gate.

By 1300 hours on way to Gorlitz station. At station we had all walking cases, 13 lying cases hand carried by French orderlies. Capt. Tony Stallard arrived from camp and 45 palliases were brought down.

Train of 30 cars, 5 for lying cases, one open truck for rations. We had eventually 51 lying cases from Lazarette and 35 lying cases from camp. Last patients arrived 1930 hours. It was very dark and crowded.

Arrangements were left to Tony Stallard and me, Rations to men were bread, meat, margarine (not issued then). Lazarette party given 2 tins meat, jam 20 or 2 cheese in lieu of meat.

Some Serbians gave us an American Red Cross food parcel. At 2200 hours we were under way. Air raid very close, railway wagons shaking. We had about 1,000 men, 2 medical officers and 20 cases of Holtzwohle for 30 wagons.

Sunday, Feb. 18 (1945)

Cool night, many fleas. Had breakfast – bread, cheese and a drink. Went through Dresden in morning. Many fires from bombing. Issue - 1 kg loaf per man, meat 1 tin for 6, margarine. Some bread had been stolen. Red Cross parcels at Stalag and Lazarette had been divided - one parcel for 8 men with 9 cigarettes per man. This was issued at Riese, north west of Dresden. There were long halts during the day.

We had one Unter officier and 10 posten for whole train. Sick were fairly comfortable, gave one, Pte Rowe morphine. Pte Cummings developed Scarlet fever. There were 4 of us eating together Tony (Capt. Stallard), Jimmy (Sanitator), an RAF Flight Lieutenant who had had surgery and myself.

Many men in camp had made 'blowers' (miniature forges with fans made from wood base and tin from food cans) One could boil water in 2 or 3 minutes with a small quantity of wood chips. We had one and could make hot drinks for our patients. This had been carried on the march.

Ate at 15.30 hours made last rounds of trucks bed at 1915 hours. During night there were air raids but made fast-trip with electric engine.

Monday, Feb. 19 (1945)

Train stopped at Halberstadt 0730. This was about halfway between Leipzig and Hanover S.W. of Magdeburg. Did rounds of lying cases. Hot cocoa from blower for pneumonias and serious cases.

Stopped all morning. A strafe party had an American sentenced to 30 years gave him bread and cigarettes. Word of fighting In Gorlitz area. At the station, beside our train was a Luftwaffe train with a car with A.A. gun.

About 1330 hrs police came to Tony and me claiming our men had stolen Luftwaffe food and gave us one hour to produce the food and the culprits or they would shoot ten men. Before the hour was up 2 RAF Mustangs appeared and were fired at by the Luftwaffe A.A. which resulted in 2 strafing runs at the train. Our men were mostly outside the railway wagons and we had 11 killed and 26 wounded in a few minutes.

The food incident was forgotten; 10 dead and 20 wounded were left at Halberstadt. We moved during the night; had air raids; nothing close. In the confusion following the air attack, the American from the labor gang (strafe party) was given a uniform and joined our group.

Tues.- Feb. 20 (1945)

Passed through Hanover; heavily damaged, reached Follingbostel about noon. Walkers marched to camp; sick slowly cleared by lorry along with X-Ray and diathermy machine from Lazarette Gorlitz.

Arrived at Stalag XIB Lazarette at 1630 hrs. About 3000 British prisoners; 4 doctors and 300-400 men were airborne captured at Arnheim. One doctor had infection and was unable to work. Tony and I with Jim as orderly were in a room in barracks with sick from train. Lights out at 19.30. Bed by candle light.

Wed. Feb. 21 (1945)

Up at 07-30 Breakfast, then checking wards. Went to Lager to see men; quick sick parade; checking how many were sick. We went to see Chefarzt re medical arrangements with negative results. Made ward rounds; everyone quite well after trip. Had shower; supposed to last one month.

Weighed 58 kg (123 pounds) in clothes. Had been 80 kg (176 pounds) at New Years.(1945)

Thurs. Feb. 22 (1945)

Up at 07.30. Went to lager doing sick parade. Men were deloused and bathed. Air raid and strafing along railway. Back at 14.30; patients bathed; did ward rounds. Tony doing 3 wards and I did 3 wards.

My notes stopped at this time. The daily programme became routine, increasing works decreasing supplies and food.

Stalag XIB was across a road from a large military camp. My memory is that of an S.S. barracks. If we faced that camp. to our left there appeared to be a small village and past that on a hill 2 or 3 km away was another Stalag.

Several times work parties from that camp came to our camp either bringing patients to the Lazarette or picking up a few rations. In this way I met some Canadians and prisoners from Lamsdorf who had reached Stalag 357 from the march.

Our camp had the Lazarette where the Chefarzt had refused permission for Dr. Stallard and I to work, so we used long, single-storey wooden barracks as sick wards. Rooms were lined with triple bunk beds with a small room for medical supplies and 2 or 3 orderlies. It was difficult treating lying cases on the bunk beds. Many were too ill to be deloused and with the old palliases for mattresses we had problems with body lice.

In the camp were many nationalities, with one Italian doctor in a separate wire compound with a small X-ray machine, who claimed he was a lung specialist. He saw 3 or 4 patients a day and would do nothing for the many men arriving on the march from the east.

Almost daily now groups of men arrived and the estimate was that we had 10,000 men in our camp.

There had been some Russian prisoners in our camp when we arrived and I remember being told of a Russian camp near the rear of our camp but I never saw it and I never was in Stalag 357.

Our sick numbers increased so the men had to stay in their bunks and we checked them there.

Conditions in camp were deteriorating, number of men increasing, decreasing food, more sick and many dying.

As word of the Russian advance from the East and the Allied advance from the west became known, camp discipline became disorganized. Several groups were made to march out of camp and some after marching for several days were returned to camp. There were constant air attacks in the area and we were allowed to paint a large P.O.W. on the roof of each barrack.

I vividly recall Easter Sunday as a Sgt. Major took me to the rear of the camp where a small building was used as a morgue. This was piled with dead that had not been buried due to confusion and lack of able men.

About this time we realized that the German barracks and most of our guards were gone leaving only a very few posten (guards).

From this time, each posten (guard) was accompanied on guard duty by 2 POWs on orders of the Senior Medical officer.

Liberation!

Though we could hear the distant fighting it was several days before we woke up on Monday, April 17 (1945) to find British troops outside the camp.

They had liberated the Belsen-Bergen concentration camp on Saturday. There was no mention of this camp in your notices.

After liberation, I was able to walk about the German barracks. A British Field Ambulance used the Officers mess and I walked through the huge 3-storied buildings used as store-rooms, full of goods and articles from captured countries.

I liberated a case of Eau de Cologne, 4-7-11, which I gave to my mother and sisters later on at home.

At this time, we estimated there were 10,000 men in camp, nearly 5,000 bedridden so evacuation was set up in a convoy of lorries for the walking and an ambulance convoy for the sick.

Each day the two convoys made a four hour trip to the nearest Allied airfield and were air-lifted to England.

Because of the numbers of sick and only 5 working doctors we had to stay for several days.

Finally the numbers of sick were reduced and after about 10 days Capt Stallard and I were told that, as long-term prisoners, we could leave with an ambulance convoy.

I am a patient in hospital in England on May 8, 1945 (V-E-DAY)

This may or may not be what you wanted in the way of history but most of it is from daily notes at the time and some of memory but it is difficult to forget many events of the time. I have enclosed photocopies of 3 Ausweist the only documentation I have and one picture of myself, my medical sergeant John Drake, New Zealand, my orderly Jimmy Theobald, London, Eng.; taken in a photography shop in Freiwaldaup, Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1943.

Wes Clare and Earl Clare (also a POW) when they returned home