

The Death March

by

Henry Albert Silk

At one time of our captivity as a P.O.W. in Italy we thought we would be seeing England sooner than we expected when our troops landed but much to our disappointment, the Germans very promptly marched us away to Germany. Our 5 days travel in cattle trucks without release was 1st class travelling in comparison with the 800 mile force march which we endured. I am going to relate to you with extracts from my diary.

We arrived at Stalag VIII B in East Germany hungry, tired and dirty. The camp was well organised and equipped by the Red Cross, we were issued with one Red Cross parcel each (which consisted of butter, tea, sugar, biscuits and chocolate) and enjoyed a long awaited meal.

I was only there a few weeks when I was transferred to a working party at Hiedlebreck. After 12 months there we were transferred to another working camp near Auschwitz the well known concentration camp (of course unknown to us then). We were there about a month, it was January 1945 and a very cold

Winter it was. On the Sunday, January 21st, the German Sgt Major came into the camp and gave orders to pack and be ready to march by 1330hrs. We had been expecting something like it for the last two days (because Krakow had been taken by the Russians and were advancing towards Auschwitz, we could hear gun fire very plainly). The snow was falling heavy and it was about 10% below freezing. It was the beginning of an experience I will never forget and if I could have foreseen what we were going to endure, I would never have believed we would see England again, in fact, I wouldn't have attempted it but not knowing what each day had in store for us, we kept on and it was only sheer guts and courage that kept us going and the thought of England and home and the will to beat the Germans of breaking our spirit, we won in the end.

We were assembled in the camp yard and were counted and re-counted to make sure nobody was missing. Approximately at 1400hrs we began our march. (We packed what we wanted, 2 blankets, a change of clothes and what food we could carry from Red Cross parcels which were in store, we had to carry our belongings as there was no transport). Our first sight as we entered the village were two political prisoners lying in the gutter, probably too weary and hungry to keep up with their column and were just shot and left there, that was an example what would happen to us if we fell out. I can assure you they were not a very nice sight. We had marched about 10 miles without a halt and we were just about on the verge of collapse when we were halted. The guards told us we had just another mile to go and that mile amounted to another 8 miles,

Eventually we arrived at a camp, and what a camp, but as good as a palace to us, our feet and legs were soaking and body was red hot which is very discomforting. We were marched through two large barb-wire gates and divided into parties of twenty and put into barrack rooms and locked in without any food or drink and no fire, but the wooden bed was a godsend to our tired bodies. They were not beds really, they were more like platforms, upper and lower berths so you were all together in one bed. We dried ourselves the best we could and wrapped our blankets around us and slept, despite the fleas, which there were plenty.

The following morning we were issued with hot coffee with no milk or sugar but gratefully received and it was drunk as if it were tea. We found we were in a large camp, which was once a Russian P.O.W. Camp, there were a few Russians still there working at the near-by coal mine. We sorted our kit out and threw half away so that just left us with 2 blankets, one vest, shaving kit and our overcoat and of course the clothes we were wearing as well. After that first days march, I for one, was going to travel light. We gave some of our kit to the Russians and burnt the rest as the Germans stopped us giving it to them. Later in the morning we were issued with 500 grams of bread, which is approx 1lb and about 3pm we were given 1 pint of soup, which consisted of rice and potatoes , if you could find any potatoes you were lucky but it was hot and filling for an hour or two. Rumours were heard of transport and that put a bit of spirit into us. It snowed very heavy that day and we were very thankful that we were resting. We managed to find some odd bits of wood, we lit the fire and

made some tea which we still had from the parcels, and I can't tell you how much it was appreciated.

The following morning we were called out about 3am that was on the 23rd. It was still snowing and bitterly cold. We joined a column of about 2,000 Russians and were stood waiting until 6.30am before we started to move. The German guards were grumbling about the cold and waiting about and it was a pleasure to see them uncomfortable, our feet were frozen and our hands were useless. In the distant we could see Russian gun-fire and fires reflecting in the skies. We marched until 4pm covering 12 and a half miles, when we arrived at a place called Oreshe, the Germans said they were sorry, but the supply wagon had not come in yet and there were no rations, they billeted us in the town hall and we were so tightly packed we were lying against on another, we were issued with straw, which made it a bit more comfortable.

The morning of 24th we were told to be ready to march by 8am and we would be marching until 8pm as there was no transport available, the only transport we were going to get was shanks pony. It was a cruel days marching, it had been freezing hard all night and we could just as well been walking on ice. Columns of German tanks and guns passed us, going to the front. It was a common sight to see Russian prisoners lying dead on the roadside, frozen to death, at least their misery was finished, some of them only had sacking tied round their feet for boots, I actually saw one Russian walking or crawling on his hands and knees, what happened to him I don't

know but there was only one thing the Germans would do to him.

We arrived at a small mining town call Rybeck at 9pm we only covered 16 miles but I think we walked double, for every step we took forward we slipped back two. There was no soup or bread issued to us so we had to use our Red Cross foodstuff which was nearly finished. Our shelter was an old school with stone floors but like a feather bed to my weary body.

We left Rybeck the following day and to our surprise, we were issued with a pint of soup and one slice of bread before we left. It was still snowing very heavy and freezing hard, I always remember they say in England, 'when it snows it will be warmer' but not in Germany, it got colder, so I don't believe it anymore. Russian gunfire could still be heard in the distant but we were moving faster than them and our liberation hopes were dashed. Our distance for that day was 14 miles. We arrived at Ratibor, another mining town but we had another 2 miles to go to a small village where we were put into a guest-house, as they call it, issue of straw once again, the only pity was, it was thrashed.

On Friday 26th, a day of rest for us, we were issued with bread and a piece of margarine. I sold a pair of long woollen pants and a pair of dirty socks for bread. I think I got about 2 lbs, in the afternoon we were issued with soup and it was the best we had so far. I washed and shaved for the first time since we left the camp, we couldn't get any water so we washed in snow and I certainly felt better, some old soldier told us not to wash our

feet or change our socks and we took his advice and I never had one blister all through the march, when we finally reached our goal my socks fell off.

We left Ratibor about 8pm, we joined the Russians about a quarter of a mile further on, and how they were still enduring it was beyond me. We had only marched 7 miles when we were halted and to our surprise were told this was as far as we were going today. It was a small village called Kobiowitz, we were now well into the open country away from civilisation so it seemed and there was no sound of gunfire anymore, only the harsh voices of our guards, trying to make our life a worse misery than what it was.

We have been one week on the march and covered about 70 miles, which was very good under the circumstances, this is another day of rest and quite a change to have dry feet, our boots are sodden and impossible to get them dry, we keep rubbing them with straw to get some of the wet out. We never had one morsel of food from the Germans, so we used the last of our Red Cross parcel except a tin of condensed milk and butter which we kept in case of a bread issue. There was plenty of time to sleep but we couldn't, when you are hungry, sleep is out of the question.

The morning of the 29th which was the beginning of our second week, welcomed us with a snow blizzard. Our boots were still wet but they still had to go on, but once you got your feet in them it wasn't so bad, although they were like ice. We marched all day with only 2 halts and arrived at Karsiwitz guest

house, we were issued with 1 lb of bread and one pint of soup, that meant a good nights sleep. There were two fires in the room which heated the big room a bit, we managed to dry our boots and socks and it was a lovely feeling to have, to be able to have dry feet for the following morning. Our distance was 11 miles that day.

It was still snowing when we left Karsiwitz and although we had dry feet and legs, when we left they were soaking within half-an-hour. We had travelled about half a mile when the landlord from the guest house came and stopped the column and asked the officer in charge if he would ask us who took a billiard cue. Apparently, somebody had taken it for a walking stick, of course, nobody owned up and nobody had it. The officer threatened to shoot ten men at the end of the days march if it was not returned, the feeling that gave me was sickly, all day I couldn't get it off my mind, I wished the morrow was here, perhaps my number might still be lucky. The sun started to shine at midday, the first since we started. We climbed about 3 miles until we reached the top of the mountains (I just can't recall the name of the mountains) at the top was a village called Odisdorf, 2000 ft above sea level. As we climbed we could see Troppau about 5 miles away below us, which meant we were getting near civilization again. We were billeted that night in a small hut 60ft x 80ft, 250 men, the last twenty men couldn't get in but the German guards made them go in, with rifle butts, one chap had two teeth knocked out, two others had bruised ribs, they got us all in and were told that was for punishment instead of shooting 10 men. About halfway through the night I was wondering which

would have been best, sleep was out of the question, if you were unlucky to get the cramp you just had to lay and suffer with it, we were never even allowed to go outside to ablution duties, in any case, the men who were at the back couldn't get out, well, no-one could, unless they walked on one another. For the first time I realised what the 'Black Hole of Calcutta' was like.

There was no soup or bread issue, if ever I hated Germans, I hated them then, and the thought that we were helpless against them, made you hate them more, but what was the use, they would get their punishment and none could be too bad for them. Our distance was 12 miles for that day.

After that most miserable and uncomfortable night, we were assemble outside and what a morning, I had read stories about the Arctic but never did I expect to encounter such condition in Germany. There was a blizzard and what a blizzard, it actually blew you over, but by holding onto one another, you were able to stand on your feet, as we left the village we entered open country and you can imagine what it was like, before we had gone half a mile our feet and legs were soaking and we were walking in drifts of 3 to 4 feet deep so progress was slow. The Russian column was considerably reduced by the end of the days march. We only passed one village consisting of about 4 houses and a farm. It stopped snowing about 2pm and quite a relief. We reached a place called Wigstadt about 4pm and were kept waiting to be billeted for one and a half hours, we were so tired we sat in the snow, it was cold and wet but very resting. When the Germans thought to move us, we went to the edge of

the town and entered the ground of a disused high school, the army had previously occupied it, there were beds and with straw mattresses, what a nights sleep I was going to have. We only covered 9 miles that day and it took us 8 and a half hours, nearly one mile an hour, not bad going, we were going places at that rate but it had been a very heavy day and we were lucky to have done that.

Today is February 1st and no march today. The best thing we found there was a good wash house, even hot showers, so we had a hot shower and against advice, we washed our feet and did I enjoy it. I still had some razor blades, I had a shave, and I felt like a new man. I think we surprised the Germans by keeping up our appearances under the circumstances, but we never forgot we were British Soldiers and not beaten yet. There was no bread issue only one meal of thick soup, which tasted like nothing on earth but was accepted like a chicken dinner. Our boots managed to dry a little but were still damp. We slept as much as we could while we had the chance.

The following morning we had a surprise issue of bread, 1lb each, before we marched off, we ate a bit to take away the hunger pain. The snow was so deep we had to have a snow plough to clear the road, very thoughtful of them. There was nothing exciting that day, we only marched another 9 miles and arrived at Schwansdorf and put in a barn. I was always under the impression straw kept you warm but I was wrong, I hardly slept that night, it was so cold.

The morning which was long awaited, greeted us with a biting wind and still freezing hard. When I went to put my boots on

they were frozen stiff, so I put some straw in them to take the coldness, my feet had to go into them, and into them they went, how I kept them in I don't know, they kept us waiting the road for a solid hour, when we moved I didn't know if I took my feet with me or not. We covered 14 miles that day the snow kept off for us but it was still very cold.

Sunday 4th February brought us to a fortnight's march, how much longer we wondered we were getting used to it now, if only the food was more plentiful. We marched through some of the wildest country I've seen, not a sign of any human life, About 4 o'clock in the afternoon we began to descend from that wild plateau, we had spent six days on it and were not sorry to leave it behind. At the bottom was a small town with a railway station and busy works, which meant we were back to civilization again and there might be a chance of more rations. When we arrived in the town we were met by the commander, and a captain, previously, they had left us with half the column of Russians. We complained through our interpreters, of bad treatment and little food and were told that he would look into the matter. We were taken to the outside to the town, which, by the way, was called Sternberg, and billeted in a barn once again. One consolation was, there was plenty of room in this one, three of my pals and myself went up into the loft and found it stacked with hay, we stayed there, it was much warmer than straw, eventually a lot more came up, we slept a lot warmer that night.

11/

The next two days were days of rest, we were issued with soup twice a day, one pint and six lbs of bread each, what a feed we had, all we needed was a smoke, we had managed to have a smoke now and again on the march, about one a day if you were lucky, but it was three days ago since we had one. I changed my socks and sold my dirty ones for five cigarettes and my pal sold his watch for twenty cigarettes and 2 lbs of bread.

After our two days recuperation, we were feeling a bit better and ready once again for our hike. The snow had cleared away a bit now and it was much easier to walk. It was really a pleasure to walk on hard roads. We arrived at Kurkesdorf and for a change were billeted in the town hall next to the railway station. There were two big fires and we managed to dry our boots and socks which were still wet from 2 days ago. A good nights sleep and very warm. There was an issue of cheese, margarine and soup.

We left Kurkesdorf with dry socks, boots and trouser legs, which used to get wet as well. We started to climb into the country again where the snow is still lying around in big drifts; our feet are wet once again. The Russians are still with us and managing to keep up with us. We only covered 11 miles but felt as if we had walked 111.

We are now in Sudetenland, in the hills, it is all forest country and not a piece of flat ground anywhere. The local people are very good, as soon as we crossed the border yesterday, they

were giving us apples and bread, the guards tried to stop it, they halted the column and told us the first man to break the column would be fired upon, one or two risked it and got away with it, at one stage some civilians had a big basket of bread waiting for us and handed it out to us as we past, eventually there was about a dozen chaps around the basket and the Germans were getting annoyed, (and when they get annoyed anything can happen as they are very quick tempered) when suddenly a burst of a Tommy gun broke the air, but it never made the lads move any quicker, they still got their bread, that was hunger, you risk anything for food when you are hungry, yes, even death. This was another slow day, marching all day and only covered 10 miles, it was very hard going.

Three solid weeks we have been marching, which brings us to February 10th. We had practically given up all hope of liberation, our belief was the Germans were just taking us anywhere; they definitely were not going to give us up so easily. God knows where we would finish up. There wasn't any use in escaping, especially in this wild country, miles from any front line, the civilians dare not help you, it would be death for them and you couldn't blame them.

We are resting today and were issued with sugar, bread and hard biscuits. The civilians of the village cooked some soup and baked potatoes and brought it up to us, there was plenty of it, naturally, and the company never gave us any.

Sunday 11th has been a day of rest, freezing cold, so we stayed in bed all day, except for soup issue and wash and shave. What wouldn't I had given for a smoke, we had nothing

left to sell, only the clothes we were wearing. We had had started to sleep in barns again and this one was terrible, draughty and holes in the roof.

We left Lupple early morning, the civilians saw us off and wished us luck, these people were certainly not Germans, and they were very good to us. We marched a bit further today, 18 miles. I was very glad when we reached our resting place, any barn would do me tonight. It had been snowing when we left, but cleared up and froze very hard, wet feet once again, I'm just about sick of wet feet, damn and blast the Germans, if I ever get the chance I'll march them until they are crawling, but I will be riding. And so we arrive at another village, 'Altstadt' and another barn but it was better than sleeping out in the open, like the Russians did one night, all the barns were full as there was about 3,000 Russians with us, yes, we learnt later on, about 300 of them slept in a field, poor devils. They can't be in very much hurry as today is another rest day. We had a honey issue, proper honey, and it was very tasty and about half pound of bread.

February 14th brought snow again. We were getting quite used to wet feet and being cold and hungry, if only the Germans would decide something, we were miles away from the fighting and we hadn't seen one enemy plane (the RAF I mean), they could very easy take us by train, wherever we are going, or if we have a destination at all. We arrived at a place called Adbtsdorf, another village with plenty of barns, which naturally we occupied one of them.

Another day of rest today. We tried to get our boots dry and we cleaned ourselves up the best we could and certainly felt better after a wash and shave. The civilians cooked plenty of potatoes for us which were about all they had, in fact they lived on them, and they had to. We sold our last article which was a wrist watch, time was no used to us now, food was more important, we got about 4 lb of bread, a bag of salt, which we missed, (a lot of potatoes and soup without salt is terrible), and an ounce of tobacco, and did it make you cough, but it was a smoke, you may say that food would have been more beneficiary to us but we found a smoke took the hunger pains away and you certainly felt better. We spent three days here and gluttoned ourselves with potatoes, we had an issue of sausage, cheese and marg, but what there was of it, we may just as well not had it but it was something extra.

Although we rested three days our boots were still wet the following morning, or should I say our boots were frozen. So once again into the ice box went my feet, it makes me shiver to recall it. There was a strong wind and it was a bitter one. We were kept waiting for an hour and when we did move my feet were numb, when the circulation started, it was painful and by now my boots had thawed out and were damp. If I have any feet left when this is over, I'll be lucky. We covered 18 miles that day, it was better going now, and the snow had cleared away quite a bit and signs of green showing here and there. About midday we crossed the border into the Protectorate, which really is Czechoslovakia, the sun started to shine, it was really a lovely afternoon and would have been appreciated under better conditions. We were billeted in a guest house and

the civilians were grand, they were sorry they couldn't give us good soup, but made what they could. The landlord went to the village and told the people there was English POW's billeted at his guest house and they all got together and made soup and collected bread, one piece of cake and 2 cigarettes each and a pint of soup. They wanted to know where we were from and told us the BBC news, they couldn't have treated us any better. One of the lads had frostbite by now and had to be taken to the nearest hospital. The Germans had to take them because it was impossible to walk any further; they had endured it for the last week. That was the happiest day for us since we left Poland, we forgot the Germans for the time being, now we had friends, they were definitely anti-German.

19th February, four weeks we have been on the move and covered 200 miles. As we left this lovely village with its kind and loving people, we were showered upon with bread and apples. It was a lovely morning, the weather had changed completely and we found it a bit warm walking. I took my overcoat off for the first time on the march and opened my neck collar, it was a glorious day and would have appreciated it under better circumstances. We arrived at a small town called Horri-firi and our distance was 15 miles. As soon as we arrived, the civilians were all over us and would have had us out of the column but for the guards stopping them. Our Billets were the town hall and a dance hall; I was in the dance hall. There was plenty of room and plenty of straw and also plenty of food which the civilians had made for us, bread and jam, cakes, apples and cigarettes.

The German corporal came in unexpectedly and I was nearly caught writing my diary up for the day, one chap had his diary confiscated a few days ago and was told it was forbidden and could be shot for it, Five men decided to escape that night now the weather was better. After we had been counted and locked in for the night they got their belongings together and waited until 11 o'clock. We took down a blackout after we had switched the lights out and it was just a matter of stepping through the window. We were billeted on a second floor and this particular window was adjoin a roof of a back shed, no sooner than they were gone, the window closed and blackout up, the guard opened the door and switched on the light, looked all around and satisfied everything was alright, closed and locked the door again. Whether they got very far, I don't know, but we never heard of them again..

The following morning we were assembled outside and counted, five men were missing and the Germans never thought for on minute that they had escaped and sent a guard in the billet to chase them out but when they discovered they had gone, what a life we had, of course, we never knew anything about it. The civilians were kept away from us and we were closely guarded with Tommy guns and rifles at the ready. We had to laugh over it and that made the Germans more annoyed. Whether it was co-incident or not I don't know but that day was the furthest we had marched in one day, 23 miles and the sun was warm, instead of being wet and cold, it was quite the opposite and we were very glad when we were at our destination, and this time it was a barn and a barn with two heavy doors, they were not taking any chances. As soon as we

were in, the mayor of the village wanted to know how many there were of us, the Germans told them we didn't want anything, we had plenty. The dirty swine's, we never got anything, only what they cooked for us themselves which was one pint of soup, bread and marg.,

21st February, one month to the day we have been marching and where we are headed for heaven knows. It started to snow again, not very cold but colder than yesterday. We were kept on the move today, 15 miles we marched, my boots were getting worse for wear, my heels were right down but better than sacking on your feet. The Russians are still with us and looking a lot better.

No march today, we are billeted in a large farm but the civvies were pro-German and wouldn't let us use their barn and we were all crammed in some sort of disused low stall, next to this stall was a small shed with turnips, one of the workers gave us a couple but when he was gone we helped ourselves. We were so crowded three of us decided to find another place and we did, a loft above the stall but we were not there very long when the German corporal found us there and we were soon chased out, I thought we had got away with it but we were not so lucky, we were made to stand in the snow for on hour and missed our soup and while we were standing there we were lectured by the corporal (who, by the way, was a Dane, he was a proper swine), someone said 'put a sock in it' you Danish bastard, if he had had his rifle with him, somebody would have got it, he wanted to know who had said it and he was told, we are British soldiers and didn't split on one another so he could please himself what he done, we were not

frightened of him or any other German, whatever he did, he would get his just desserts twelve fold. He eventually let us go and my feet were like iced blocks and no hot soup to warm us up, some of the lads saved us some but it was cold by then, we needed something hot but it was kind of them to give us half of their soup.

It was a very strong wind on this morning and a cold one too. Before we left, we were issued with one turnip between eight, we could hardly believe it, we couldn't throw it away in disgust, it was food and we made it taste like bread. That day was very tiring as we were walking against the wind but we covered 15 miles.

The wind was still blowing strong and a bit colder but the snow had practically cleared, except in the hills where we wandered now and again. (I'm just about sick of the sight of snow) I don't know the name of the place we then arrived at.

Saturday 24th February. Another week completed, how many more weeks we wondered, I wish I knew but perhaps if I had known I would have given in and that would be the last thing I would want to do, so on we go. We left earlier than usual about 630am and were kept waiting about 2 hours for the Captain and his men. It was a bitter cold wind which bit right through you, we arrived at Hr-Horie, and we clocked up another 11 miles.

Today is a rest day and very grateful for it, but it is not much of a rest when you are billeted in a barn and freezing cold. The civilians gave us some soup, potatoes and an issue of bread and marg., We managed to get a bit of tobacco from a civilian

and enjoyed a long awaited smoke although it was rolled in a piece of a letter, when the paper wouldn't stick together, we tied it round with string and moved the string as it burnt down.

We left that place with some bread and apples from the civilians, we'll be sorry when we leave this part of Czechoslovakia. The Germans were in a bad mood that day, the news must have been bad but we couldn't manage to get anything from them, we kept saying Germany kaput, and that made them worse. When we arrived at our billeting town or village, and put into a barn, and what a barn, we may as well of been out in the open. We made a complaint to the Captain and were promptly told to remember we were POW's and not on holiday.

Today is March 1st and kept up its tradition by a strong wind but it was dry, we also had dry feet for a change, and how comfortable. It was very hard going against the wind and was very glad when we were halted and allotted to our billets, the usual one barn. I think it was the hardest day we had for a couple of weeks but one consolation, it is dry. We managed 20 miles and it took us all day. We received our usual soup with on slice of bread each, how they expect us to keep going on that, is a marvel, we owe a lot of our energy to the Czech civilians, and grand people they are.

I was not sorry when the morning came, I hardly slept through the night, it was so cold and my legs suffered with cramp, I

was glad to get outside and get moving. The wind was worse than the day before, in fact, the worst we had had so far and bitter cold, I only hope we won't be going far and will be put into a much warmer barn. Two of the lads have dysentery but they are made to keep up with the column, they must be all out. We made 20 miles this day and although it was dry it was bitter cold.

Another rest day and not sorry, the wind dropped and not so cold, we had an issue of hot coffee in the morning, it was hot and warmed you a bit. At least we braved the weather and stripped to the waist to wash and shave ourselves. The guards hardly knew what to make of us, up to then, not one man has had a louse. Three men were sent to hospital that morning to Konigrage I think, and not before time. At midday we were issued with soup and boiled potatoes, bread, marg and honey issue, they must be losing the war....

Today is Sunday 4th March, the beginning of the 7th week of the march and still no signs of stopping anywhere, there was a rumour a couple of days previous of stopping at Konigrage but that was false as we have left Konigrage behind now. The snow is gradually clearing away but it is still cold, all we manage to talk about now is roast dinners and sitting by a red hot fire. Some of our tempers get the better of us but the little incident is soon forgotten as everyone understands, the same thing, day in, day out, it wouldn't be so bad if you could get a little more food. We arrived at a place called Privory, one of the worst places we have been billeted. There were not many civilians in this small village but they managed to cook us some potatoes but what was the use, the Germans only cut

their issue down. We only covered 12 miles today.

We left Privory at daybreak and passed the signpost 'Prague 20 kilometres (18 and a half miles) naturally of course, that started a rumour, but who cares about rumours, I'm sick of them, fed up with everything and everybody, roll on a long time. We marched onto the main Dresden road which was strewn with refugees from Dresden. They told us it had fallen to the Russians: (I guess Dresden to be about 60 to 80 miles away) that was good news to us, especially when you are down in the dumps. We only marched about 2 miles on the main road and then turned off to our usual by pass road, back into the wild country again. We stopped at a village another mile further on call Drionot, drafty barns or not, I was glad to get inside one and rest, Oh for a nice feed and a decent sleep.

Tuesday 6th March. There was not much rest as the barn we were in was just like a colander, we just couldn't get warm and wished we were on the move, we may be tired but we are warm. The civilians sent some soup, bread and a mug of coffee each although there was no milk or sugar in it, it was much appreciated, and you felt the warmth of your body gradually return.

We left Drionot and not sorry to leave, any more barns like that and we won't be walking much longer. About midday there was a fall of snow. I thought we had seen the last of it. It will be a change to get wet feet again, we really got used to it. We had only done 11 miles (20 km) and we arrived at a place called

Fuin and for a change we had a 1st class barn, with plenty of straw. To our utmost surprise we were issued with 10 cigs each and a card to write home (which never arrived) it was my first smoke for 6 days and it was as good as a meal, it stayed the hunger pains, of course, we were told smoking forbidden as the place might catch fire but who cared, it wasn't ours, and to us, a smoke was more important than the barn setting afire so we snatched a few puffs, I really slept well that night but it was too good to last.

Everyone was in better humour that following morning and whether we had to march 5 or 50 miles I don't think it would have bothered us. It was bitter cold and the sky was full of snow. About midday we entered the outskirts of Prague, we were hoping to go through the town but we kept to the suburbs. As we left Prague behind, we entered wilderness once again. About 2 miles from Prague and we were disturbed by the noise of aircraft, the company commander ordered us to disperse to the woods, it was our aircraft, the first we had seen, there was about two groups. What a lovely feeling it gave you, it still gave you hope and although they were flying, it seemed to me as though they were right beside you. We heard a few thuds in the distance and saw a couple of fires as the result. Once again on the march but although we were POW's we still felt in ourselves, a little bit superior to our guards, helpless as we were. We arrived at Turary, small village and were welcomed by the civilians, who at once made some soup and coffee for us. Another good barn, so another good night's sleep in store.

Today is Friday 9th March. No marching today, so we got a chance to clean ourselves up, it was cold and I can tell you, my shirt was not off for long. I must remind you all the time we have been marching; I have never washed my feet or changed my socks. (that is the only part of my body which is really dirty) but that was so the skin would keep hard and have less chance of getting blistered and it proved itself up till now. We received good food from the civilians, thick potato soup, and a bread issue with honey and sausage meat from the company. We managed to go to sleep with a full stomach that night. After two days rest and a bit of extra food, we felt a little better, all we could do was to lay about, we were only allowed in the yard and it was cold, so we stayed in the barn and tried to keep warm in the straw, but what a hope.

Today is Sunday 11th March. The beginning of the 8th week of our march, it just seems as though we are walking around in circles, waiting for the war to end, or just trying to find a place to dispose of us, it sounded fantastic but they are capable of anything barbaric when given the order to carry it out. We were miles from civilisation and nobody would be any the wiser of anything happened to us. After covering about 12 miles we arrived at a place called Rioucou, as soon as we arrived the civilians brought us some hot soup and bread, what we would have done without these people, I don't know. Another rest for us today, to be quite frank, I'm getting sick of these rest days, if we had decent accommodation instead of draughty old barns, it wouldn't be so bad and if the guards are in a bad mood we are kept inside the barn all day. We had more soup given to us by the civilians and a bread issue from the Gerries.

Tuesday 13th March brought us the first morning of spring, it was a lovely morning, you could feel spring in the air, even under the circumstances which you couldn't appreciate in the same way, it was a change from snow, rain and cold winds. I believe it was the first day I marched with my overcoat off. We covered 12 miles, which seemed to be our average for a day now, the guards must be weakening, they will be the first to weaken, and it won't be us. After an issue of soup and coffee, we were issued with 10 cigs per man, we were like school children at a tea party, and it was our first smoke for a week or more.

We are back in Germany now, we crossed the border about midday, we noticed the difference in the civilians and there was no soup or bread from these, only looks and not nice looks. We were halted in a village and were very glad of it as it was warm walking today, with a change in the weather, it was not so cold at night and we slept much better.

We left Deka on the 14th and the first thing we noticed was the difference in the civilians, which was hard to understand, for instance, the last village we left they were very good to us (they were in the protectorate) and the next village they were very hostile towards us, of course, they were governed by the Germans themselves, which had a big effect on them. It was a lovely day and it was a pleasure to be out in the sun but we would have appreciated the lovely country under better conditions, it was heaven to have dry feet and clothes at the end of the day. After we had marched about 13 miles we stopped at a place called Leaushkau.

March 15th, Thursday. A day I won't forget as it is my birthday but just another day to me. What a place to keep us for a rest, I counted 4 houses, 2 farms and nothing else, only wild country. One consolation, we had a smoke even if we didn't have very much to eat. Roll on.

We were not sorry to leave that place although it meant another days marching. There isn't any sign of a war in this part of the country, no news from anybody so we don't know if the war is over or not, it was, they would take a month to find us as we are miles from civilisation, we haven't seen a railway for a week. We halted for 5 miles and our hopes were ruined once again, 3 of our planes flew over and later on we saw a formation of bombers, you can imagine how we felt. Further down the road, we came across some empty Red X cartons which indicated that some of our troops had passed here recently. We arrived at Klein Wieshichz and had a big barn for a change, it was filthy but we were used to living in filth. There was no rushing to get a place to sleep, pick where you like, upstairs or down, it were all free and plenty of fleas for company.

*Saturday morning 17th. We were issued with a drink of coffee and an issue of bread and not before time, we missed yesterday, only soup. We had hopes of coming across a Red X centre but our luck was out, of course the Germans wouldn't help find one. We only marched 11 miles today and arrived at
L-----*

Today is the beginning of the 9th week of marching, 8 weeks we have been on the move and have got nowhere. The weather is lovely today, warm and dry.

No marching today so a good chance to have a clean up. We had a wash down and de-loused our clothes, good so far, not one louse but still plenty of time.

An issue of bread, marg and soup, with potatoes in it.

We were greeted with a drizzle of rain this morning, it was quite refreshing, it soon dried up and the sun came out. We were making slow progress today, the Germans didn't seem to be in any great hurry today, and we halted in a village and thought it was our rest house, but we moved out and it started to rain. It was some of the worst rain I have ever experienced, it was wicked, we marched 2 hours in it and at the end we were all like drowned rats, it even penetrated our heavy overcoats. We arrived at a lovely farmhouse and were pushed into the barns without any coffee or soup. I took all of my clothes off, rang them out, put them on again and tried to sleep, but only for a short while, I believe it was the most uncomfortable night I have experienced on the march, in fact, ever in my life, I believed I called the Germans everything but angels, I couldn't find words for them bad enough.

It was still raining this morning when we moved out and as we were already wet, it never mattered much, it cleared up about midday and about 3pm we arrived at a village called Wilkodyty and for a change, we had plenty of room, we needed it. Hot coffee was soon made, and soup, that made us feel a bit

better. We took our wet clothes off and slept naked amongst the straw but I don't advise anybody to try it, most uncomfortable. We were told we would not be marching tomorrow so we will have a chance to dry our clothes.

Wednesday 21st was to be a great day for us. The farmer lent us a wagon and then left for Marionbad for a Red Cross centre to get parcels.

*Thursday 22nd. Left Wilkody and arrived at Gottschau after a gruelling 20 km
The Germans took advantage of the Red Cross parcels and the issue of rations, which was very little to say the least.*

We left Gottschau on the Friday 23rd and could see large mountains in the distance, we climbed for 3 kms which we managed exhausted, billeted in a barn and issued 300 grammes of bread. We covered 20 kms. Saturday 24th was a rest day, the weather had changed and was quite warm and enjoyed the rest. We left this village (can't remember the name of it) it was a cold morning but turned out warm later on. We are feeling the strain now and we are getting very weary after another 20kms.

Monday 26th. Another 18 kms and an issue of 200 gms of bread, the Germans cart-horse broke his leg the previous night so they shot it, rationed it to the columns, very tasty and a change to eat fresh meat.

Tuesday 27th Another rest day which was very welcomed. I think the guards are getting tired. More horse meat.

Wednesday 28th Left Volenstrause and arrived at Wedden after 23 kms walk.

Thursday 29th was a day of rest and an issue of 1200gms of bread and sausage, we were told our walking days are over. Next morning at 10.30am we climbed in open trucks and arrived at Stalag at 7pm and was each issued with half of an American Red Cross parcel, also 500gms of bread.

Things are getting a bit confused, from 1st April till 13th April we moved here and there around Nurnberg. RAF bombed Nurnberg nearby, two men were wounded from shrapnel AA, which was very heavy.

No record for 10 days.

Friday 23rd. Prepared to move by 6pm. 7pm issued with Red Cross parcel each and another one as you went through their gate. We walked all night to the --?-- of 27km south of Nurnberg by Autobahn. The march lasted till 28th April, covering 235km ending 8km from Moursberg, Stalag VII A. We could sense uneasiness among the guard. We stopped at a farm and told to stay in the barn. The German Sgt Major reported British Troops in the next village. At 8.15, American infantrymen walked into the yard with hearty greeting from the lads, the guards surrendered. Three to four hours later, tanks

and infantrymen moved in the area. Small bands of SS were still holding our and sniping but were soon dealt with.

At 7pm orders to march to Moursberg, columns of troops pass us on the road, a lovely sight, smoking cigars for a change. Arrived at Moursberg and slept in a barn near Stalag.

Monday 30th. Report to Stalag, hot bath, the first so far. Billeted in a factory waiting for orders, issued with white bread, first as POW. Eventually were flown out by Dakota to Brussels and from there to England by Lancaster's.

What a lovely sight to see the White Cliffs of Dover.....

Total distance for march

Shoppivity to Mieden 825 km / 515 miles

Nurnberg to Moursberg 235km / 150 miles

Total march 1259km / 665 miles
