

THE MARCH

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We could hear the low rumbling sounds which began about the last of March, 1945. We stood outside the barracks facing east, looking toward Vienna, listening very closely, and it was really hard to believe. In the cold, spring air, we realized that our hopes and dreams were really becoming a reality: The Russians were coming! Our "battle cry" was "Come on, Uncle Joe". (Joseph Stalins' army). At that time, we thought of the Russian armies as being our allies, even though we had heard, "the Allies and Russia". As the few days passed, we could hear the big artillery guns, as they progressively became louder and louder. At night we would stand at the opened shutter-windows, or the back "porch", and would watch the flashes and listen to the rumble of the big artillery guns. The Russian army began to by-pass Vienna, and there was very little resistance from the fleeing and disorganized German army. We felt that we would be liberated soon, as the Russians were pushing hard and fast, destroying anything or everything that would delay them.

There were several "crystal set" radio sets in the camp, and the military movements from all over the world was reported to us daily. We knew of the Russian advance, and the German retreats. The ones who owned the sets would listen at night, make notes, and our "camp-news-caster" would read the news to us. We kept watch for German guards, so they would not slip up on our news-caster. Even though the radio parts had been brought in by the German guards, and traded to the Americans, the sets had to be carefully hidden from the Germans. I suppose when a guard found a set, he would probably receive a 3-day pass for "finding" them. There were 4,256 Americans in Stalag 17-B at the end of the war. Each crew of six enlisted men had one radio operator, so there were approximately 700 radio operators in the camp. I am sure that every radio operator had the skill to put together a "crystal set". Some of the men traded cigarettes from their Red Cross parcels to obtain the necessary parts, with the Germans. We received Red Cross Parcels weekly, when they were available. However, much of the time parcels were not available. The ones who had sets could listen to the news from BBC in London, or music from Vienna.

Trading cigarettes to the Germans was common for a few of the Americans. I never traded with the Germans, and I feel that most of the Americans felt the same. The Germans even knew the best brands in the parcels to be Camels, Lucky Strike and Chesterfields. The less popular brands of Chelsea, Old Gold, Domino and Twenty-Grand, were undoubtedly from an inferior tobacco. I did not smoke while I was in the prisoner of war camp, never had before or since. I suppose that I have never understood the craving for tobacco. I traded my cigarettes for food, as some of the men had rather smoke than eat. I was eager to accommodate them. My never having smoked paid off in the days to follow.

On April 6, we were told by the German authorities that we would be moving away from the Russian advances the next day. We tried to stand our ground, until they brought their guard dogs into the barracks. We knew that we had to comply. They really meant business. They did give us an extra day to get ready. The ones who had worn our uniforms and shoes were issued the last of the clothing supply. I received a pair of O. D. pants, and a new pair of G. I. shoes to replace the worn out German "hob-nail" shoes, that were very uncomfortable, as I had worn them for a full year.

The old clothing had lasted well. I had worn them every day for a year, and they needed to be replaced badly. The night of April 7, we burned all of our worn out clothing, which made the barracks the warmest it had been since we had been there. Before I burned my old trousers, I cut off one of the legs, and made a bag about 14 to 16 inches long, to hold my "trading cigarettes" and other incidentals. I made a strap from the other pants leg, to carry the bag I had made, over my left shoulder, and hang under my right arm. I made straps to carry my three blankets in a roll, and carry them on my back.

We were issued one of the last of the remaining Red Cross parcels, which was for seven men. That began our 7-man "combine", who stayed together for the march, which was to begin the next day. As I previously stated, my not ever having smoked paid off. I divided my cigarettes, which I had saved, among the seven-man "combine", with the agreement that "if any of us could trade for food, we would eat together."

On April 8, we were all awoken in a bedlam. To be sure we were ready to "move out", some of the German guards brought in their dogs. Anybody who would move too slowly, the guards would give us the "rush" with their dogs. We could hear the Russians big guns, but somehow our battle cry of "come on Uncle Joe", subsided, as we moved out of Stalag 17-B. We left our hopes behind, of being liberated by the Russians.

We were counted into groups of 500, for the march, and I'm not sure it was when we left out of the main gate. We were very quiet and orderly as we went through the main gate, as there were several of the Nazi party members, with their swastika arm-band around their arm. Some of the SS-troopers were stationed at the main gate, so we were sure to be orderly. The Nazi party big-wigs were holding their Doberman dogs on leash. The SS-troopers were holding their Shepherd dogs by leash, also. All of the dogs were sitting quietly by their masters, ready to attack, if their masters turned them loose, and gave the word. We did not breathe very easily, until we were off the road leading from the camp of Stalag 17-B, and on the narrow black-top highway, heading toward Krems. The opposite direction would have taken us into Czechoslovakia, which was only a short distance away. Just before we thought we would enter into Krems, we were turned toward the west, to follow the Danube river. The Danube was on our left side, and a hedgerow was on the right. We had no idea where we were going, and nobody would tell us. I doubt if any of the guards knew. The Danube was a brown and muddy color. The "Blue Danube", as is in the Johann Strauss' songs was certainly not blue. Possibly, at certain times of the year, it might blue, but certainly not, while the snow is melting in the mountains, and swelling its' banks past the river banks. We could see the Danube most of our 18-day march, but occasionally we would not see the Danube, as we followed the black-top road. We would soon be back close, though. The Germans marched us at a brisk pace, late into the night, and would not let us slow down to rest. It was late, when they finally stopped us for the night, inside a cold Catholic Church building. We were very crowded. Some took a pew-bench to sleep on, while others slept on the floor. I took one of the pews, with somebody else sleeping on the other end. I didn't know anybody was, as it was pitch dark, and very cold. While the sun was going down, it began to get colder and colder, as we were getting into the mountainous area. It was noticeable, too, that we could no longer hear the Russian artillery fire. The Germans had pushed us faster, and farther than the Russians had advanced.

Being in the mountainous area could have deadened some of their sounds. Our hopes of being liberated by the Russians had vanished. We found out later that our liberation by the Russians was not for the best, after all, as they just shot their artillery guns at whomever and whatever was ahead of them. Were the Germans intentionally doing a big favor, in disguise, for us? We will never know. We do know that Hitler gave the order for all of the American prisoners-of-war to be shot. Eva Braun, his mistress stopped the order from being carried out.

Early the next morning, we were "rousted" out by the German guards, just after day-break. They gave a loaf of bread to us for seven men. Our "combine" shared our loaf. One loaf of bread daily was the daily ration, for the 18 days we were on the march. The younger German guards were replaced, either after the first, if not the second day of our march, by much older Germans, the "Volksturm". (People's Army) Possibly, the younger guards went for a last stand for Hitler, we didn't know. The "Volksturm" guards were possibly in their 60's or 70's. They wore ill-fitting uniforms, with some of them wearing "civilian" overcoats. I remember one Volksturm guard, that told us that he had been a professor at a university in Vienna. He told some of our men that he was 82 years of age, and all of his family had been killed in an air raid at Vienna.

Each morning, we would begin marching early and would march late into the night. Some days we would stop early, if there was a barn we could stay in. The march began taking its' toll on the older men. We found it to be harder and rougher on them, than it was on us. Most of us were in our early twenties. There were some of our men who were nearing thirty. We found that the German guards did not drink water, as we did. They always carried wine, and drink it, instead of water. The more wine they drank during the day, the more they drank, and the thirstier they became. By night, they were becoming very irritable, including the 82 year old professor. Then sometimes they would become downright mean to us. After all, there was about two generations difference in our age. There was one young German guard who was undoubtedly the top ranking "non-com". He carried a full-automatic rifle, and had a German shepherd dog. This dog was the most intellegent dog I had ever seen. He was not on a leash, but went back and forth by us, during the march. You could reach down and "pet" him, and call him by his name, "Ring". He never tried to bite anybody that I heard of, but I am sure that if his master gave the command, he wouldn't stop until his master called him. On about the fourth day, Ring and another dog got into a fight. The German guard gave a command to Ring. Ring stopped fighting immediately, but the other dog did not. The other dog clamped his teeth into Ring's neck, and killed him immediately. The guard became very irritated and mean to us Americans, and it seems that he tried to take his anger and frusterations us. About two days after Ring was killed we were going along the winding mountainous black-top road. The road made a long-steep slope, then doubled back to about 200 to 300 yards from where we were, then curved around another mountain. A group of us "boys" decided to take a short-cut. down the slope, and save walking possibly a mile or more. We began climbing down the steep hill, to take the short-cut. We heard the young German guard, who had been Rings' master call out to us in German. We kept climbing down the steep hill. The guard cut loose at us

with his fully-automatic rifle. We scrambled back up the hill, and went the long trip, on the blacktop highway, instead of the short-cut. Even though the war was nearly over, they still had the rifle, and would use it.

There was always a problem of finding farmers who would allow us to stay in their barns for shelter, and be out of the cold nights. Some of the farmers would not allow us to spend their barns, afraid that lice would fall from us into the hay, making the whole barn infested with lice. Several nights we had to sleep out in the open, but the German guards didn't like sleeping in the open air any more than we, as they would have to keep a closer watch, to keep us from escaping. In the barns, with us inside, and the guards in the door openings, it was practically impossible for us to get out. We were told by our camp leaders, before we left Stalag 17-B to stay in the marching group, and not try to escape, as long as we were going toward the American lines. Their reason was that there were SS-troopers all in the woods, and they would shoot us on sight. I have been told, since, that several did escape, on their own, and have not been heard from since.

On the third day of the march, things became fairly eventful. A lone American P-38 came swooping down on us. We knew to not run to the ditches, as he would probably "open up" on us with his 50-calibers. We all stayed on the black-top road, and began waving at him wildly. He flew from one end of the 500 men to the other. We felt that he possibly could not see that we were American prisoners-of-war, as we were wearing such a varied mixture of uniforms. On his third pass over us, he waved his wings from one end of our 500 men to the other. We began jumping up and down, waving wildly at him, as we knew he had recognized us as being American prisoners-of-war, even though we were wearing our mixture of uniforms. It was such a thrill to see him waving his wings at us, in recognition. While he was waving his wings, he turned, and flew away. I'm sure there was not a dry eye among us, as he flew away, waving his wings. Every day, afterwards, while we were on the march, he would fly over us, waving his wings, then fly on his way. We knew that he definitely recognized us, and was checking on us daily. We had something to look forward to, that being his fly-over.

On the third day, also, we were given a cup of boiled, sweetened barley. For some reason, the barley gave me a bad case of dysentery. With hardly nothing else to eat, except the 1/7-loaf bread daily, I became very weak. One of the men in our 7-man "combine" group suggested that I eat some charcoal to stop it. After a 3-day case of dysentery, I would do anything. The next time we were stopped long enough, for a rest, I built a fire and burned a stick to make charcoal. I quenched the burned stick with water, then began eating it. I don't recommend a charcoal diet, because it wasn't tasty, at all. But it did stop the dysentery, alright. I thought I would never "go" again. I don't think I did, until after we were liberated, more than two weeks afterward.

I do not know what kind of bread the German bread is made of, unless it is with rye. We were told that it had a substantial amount of sawdust added to it. It was very dark. Some called it "black bread". It was very crumbly, usually had the outside crust burned from a very dark brown, to black. To us hungry men, it was delicious. We only needed more!

We had very little luck trading the cigarettes I distributed among our group of seven. It was so hard to get to the food to do the trading, while we were

on the march. Only once, I slipped out of the long line of men, without being caught by the Germans. I went into a "dog-run" hall of a farm house, and knocked on a door. (A "dog-run" hall is a very old type of house, with a wide hall from the front to the back, with no doors on either end of the hall. The rooms are on each side of the hall.) I was about ready to give up and go back into the line of men, when a robust woman, who looked to be a slave worker from either Russia or Poland, opened the door. I asked her in my broken German, if she had any potatoes, apples, eggs or bread. ("catofel, apfel, eyre or brot") She had a fearful look on her face, as she nervously glanced around, and answered, "nein, nein". (no, no) I took about six or eight cigarettes from the sack that I had hanging from my shoulder, and gave them to her, with the understanding that she had nothing she could trade, or she was afraid to take any chances. I immediately turned to rejoin my group. As I turned to leave, she called, "ein moment". (one moment) I turned back to her, as she opened a door and went inside, and motioned for me to follow. She filled my sack to the top with apples. I gave her a full, unopened pack of cigarettes. She was very happy and gracious with our trade, and so was I. I told her "thank you" in German, and turned from the farm house and slipped back in line with the marching G. I.'s, without being noticed by the German guards. If they had seen me, they would have taken the apples from me, and of course, I would have gotten some kind of punishment. The woman at the farm house could have received some punishment, also. I hurried to catch up with with the other six of our group, and divided the apples among us all. The apples were very delicious, the first I had eaten since before I had left the States, about 18 months. As well as I can remember, one of the men of our group of seven traded for some eggs, and another traded for some potatoes.

We had been marching along the narrow black-top road since April 8th., on the north side of the Danube. On April 12, we could see the city of Linz on the south banks of the muddy Danube. We came to a long, narrow bridge, still intact, crossing the Danube. (It had not been bombed.) We were turned south, to cross over the bridge. I was about fifty yards onto the bridge, the air raid sirens began their mournful wail. The air raid sirens in Germany had to be the most mournful sound I have ever heard. That sound would make goose pimples pop up, and your hair stand on the ends. I have never heard such a sound since I got back to the States. The sound was much like a long wail. It is indescribable, so I can't describe it. Our first thought when we heard the sirens beginning, was, "they are going to bomb Linz, and the bridge we are crossing is one of the prime targets." We all began moving as fast as possible to get across the bridge. After the immediate group that I was with was across, we still had to move very fast, or as fast as possible, as the men coming behind us, and the ones still on the bridge were rushing to get across too. We knew that bridges across the rivers were prime targets. A short distance out of Linz, we began to slow our pace. We saw the high walls of a prison, which we were told to be the Mauthausen Concentration camp. Off to our right were discarded clothing scattered everywhere. Patches of blood was everywhere. I saw two or three bodies still lying on the ground. It looked as if there had been a massacre earlier that morning. They had removed all of the bodies, except a few that were still there. As we went by the Mauthausen camp, there was an ominous silence among us, with nobody talking. There was a group of the Mauthausen prisoners that were approaching us, meeting our formation. I watched them coming by our ranks, making motions for cigarettes, as they saw the Americans smoking, and I'm sure they could smell

the smoke. These poor men were actually starving to death, they had a grayish-blue complexion. Their eyes were sunk back into their heads, and they looked as if their skin was only over their bones, with nothing to shape their heads and faces, except the skin and bones. We were in bad condition, ourselves, but these poor men were in much worse condition than we. On seeing their condition, and seeing that they were wanting a cigarette so badly, on an impulse, I reached into the bag strapped under my shoulder and took out ten or twelve loose cigarettes. I waited for their guard to get by, changed the cigarettes from my right hand to my left. I waited for the last man on the left side of their column, and caught his eyes watching me, also. As we were just beside each-other, I reached out and put the cigarettes into his hand. He was eager to accept them. THEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENED: Some of the others of this group saw me give the cigarettes to this man. They all broke ranks and ran to me for a cigarette, or possibly their "share". The German guard came back and went into a rage, slapped his holster to unsnap it, and the Luger was coming from his holster to shoot me. He was yelling to me, "schwein hund, schwein hund", and other choice curse words at me, in German. (The word "schwein-hund" means "pig-dog" in English.) I hastily turned my back on him, and joined our marching group, expecting him to shoot me at any time. But miraculous thing happened, as there was an SS-trooper behind thier marching column, that I did not see. A friend, Bill Goode told that there was the SS-trooper on the other side, and at the back of their column, with his automatic rifle raised, and pointing at us to "spray" us with bullets. I did not see the SS-trooper. Neither of the guards shot, as I thought they would, as I didn't feel a bullet go through me. I turned my head to look back, about thirty or forty yards away, since he didn't shoot me. I saw the German guard pushing and shoving those poor starved men back into their ranks. The incident that I didn't see was the SS-trooper, at the end of their ranks, on their right side. After Bill Goode told told me, as we were along beside each-other, "boy, he was about to shoot you", I simply said, "yeah, I know". I told him that I didn't see the SS-trooper or expect them to all break ranks to run to me. Bill told me that he thought he was going to "spray" all of us with his fully automatic rifle. I knew that Bill was right, as the SS-troopers were only eager to shoot anybody. I'll never know why he didn't shoot into our group, to shoot me. I don't remember any of these starving men wearing the Star of David, as all Jewish prisoners had to wear. They were wearing dirty striped white and gray striped clothing, with a round striped cap on their heads. I am sure these men were "political" prisoners instead of Jews. The political prisoners were the leaders of the countries that the Germans over-ran, and put them in the concentration camps, the same as they did the Jews. They also imprisoned any person who they found to resist the German movement, whether they be man, woman or child. I'm sure many, many of the political prisoners died, as well as the women and children, the same way the Jews died. The Jews only have not let the world forget what the Germans did, and I applaud them for this. We were very glad to get past the Mauthausen prison camp, and to be out sight of it, on the narrow black-top road, into the country-side. We breathed the fresh country deeply ^{into} into our lungs, as a feeling of freedom, even though we were still prisoners-of-war. A good friend, Luther Victory, who was in the last group to leave Stalag 17-B told me that the Germans put him, and his group in the Mauthausen camp for the night. He said that he had a feeling that he had never had before, and they were so relieved when they were taken out, and on the march again. They were wondering if this would be their "homes" for the remaining days, possibly the rest of their lives.

The mystery that has stuck in my mind, beginning when I was first taken as a prisoner-of-war, was the intense craving of a cigarette, these men had. In Stalag 17-B, men would trade their much-needed food for cigarettes. They had rather smoke a cigarette, than to eat. As we left the Mauthausen Concentration camp behind, I thought of these poor thin men, who were actually starving to death, for food. They had so great a desire and craving for a cigarette, they were willing to be shot for them. I thought too, of how foolish it was of me to reach into my bag, try to give a few cigarettes to one person. I had no idea that the group of 20 to 24 men would break ranks and run to me. Certainly, I did not know that the SS-trooper was on the other side of them! When I was in Dulag Luft, at Frankfurt, Germany, I saw men shredding dried out cabbage leaves, trying to make a cigarette. They would roll these leaves, as well as possible, and ask a guard for a match. The guard would glance around nervously, to be sure none of the other German soldiers were watching. When he was sure that he would not be seen, he would slip a match to these men. These men would "light up", then complain about their cabbage-leaf cigarettes not tasting like tobacco. When I was a youngster, I grew up during the depression days. My Dad did not work regularly, and sometimes food at home would be scarce. But he was hardly without his chewing tobacco. I suppose that was the same craving. As I grew up, I chose to not smoke or chew tobacco, and have been proud of it every since.

The next day, on April 13th., a German guard told some of our men that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died the day before. We didn't want to believe him, but the sad word passed quickly through our ranks of 500 men. We only wanted to find out later, that it was only "German propaganda". But later that day, we were told was true, by an English soldier, who was marching the opposite direction from us. The English soldier was an "ally" of ours, so we had to believe it. The German guards seemed to sympathize with us, and it seemed that they felt no joy of us having lost our President. We appreciated the German guards' sympathy. I'm sure if the news had been that they had lost their leader, Hitler, we would have shouted for joy. In losing President Roosevelt, it all seemed like "the end", but I feel that President Truman did a superb job at taking over the tremendous task.

Later, that same date, there came a hard drenching rain, with us on the road marching. We were soaked "to the bone", and our blankets, as well as our few other possessions we were carrying, was soaked through and through. When the rain stopped, the German guards stopped us for a much-needed rest, as they were soaked also. We rung the water from our blankets, overcoat, and other things, as well possible. As the sun had begun shining brightly, it helped with our task. The old Volksturm guards did the same. The long days on march was taking its toll on all of us, especially the much older guards. They began to look "beaten". The old guards were becoming more irritable, as each day went by. As for us Americans, we all had sore and aching feet, especially us who had frost-bite from the cold winter. It was still very cold every night, as we were still into the mountainous country, and into the early spring of the year. My new G. I. shoes had to be "broken-in" the hard way, by continuously walking. There were several blisters on our feet. If we only had an extra pair of socks, it would have helped. Not having the socks made it so much worse. We

had to repack our possessions, and roll our blankets, overcoat, etc., after the nice rest period. That night we were housed in a good barn, with plenty of hay to spread out, so it would be somewhat warmer under our damp blankets, as they had not dried completely during our rest period. The next day, the Germans gave us a day of rest, so we took that as an opportunity to completely dry our blankets, overcoat, etc. We stayed in the same barn the second night. On the nights we were housed in barns, the first and primary thing to do was to claim a "spot" to sleep. The next thing was to search for eggs. Occasionally, some lucky G. I. would hit "pay dirt, and find a nest full.

The next day, we were back on the "march". Even though I have used the word "march" there was more of a "trudge", than marching. None of ^{us} tried to keep in step, and we would pass the ones as some began falling behind, in the group, leaving too much space between. We were to march at our will, as long as we kept up with the group, on the black-top road, and didn't fall behind.

Once, while we were on the march, there was a bushel basket filled with potatoes sitting just off the black-top road, only about four feet away. I feel that the German farmers had intentionally placed them there for us. I stepped off the black-top road, just far enough to reach the potatoes, to fill my sack. When the guard saw me move toward the basket, he called something to me in German. I knew that he was telling me to leave the potatoes alone, and get back on the black-top road. I stood at the basket of potatoes, and when he got to where I was standing, he was making motions with his hands, and telling me in German to move on. I made the motion to him that I only wanted to fill my sack with them. He spoke to me more sternly, as I presented my "plea". I knew I had lost my case, then I caught up with my group, who were laughing at me, and my persistence. They had been watching me, as I was trying to talk to him in English, and he speaking German to me. I'm sure he didn't know a word of English. I knew by his tone of voice that he was going to see that I wouldn't get any potatoes.

One day, while on our march, a wagon filled with a few Germans and mostly Americans passed us. This was not uncommon, as the wagon had passed us several times during the past days of the march. We knew to move over to make room for the wagon to pass. On back of the wagon sat a good friend, Jack Ross, who was also from my home-town of Mexia. Jack looked at me with one of his famous smiles, that made everybody like him. He waved to me, and called out some kind of greeting, as the wagon went by. Jack had a smile that would make his eyes sparkle. This was the last time I saw Jack, until both of us were back in the U. S. When Jack had parachuted from his plane, he was severely injured in the groin area, when his parachute opened. He had told me about his injury while we were in Stalag 17-B, but he did not elaborate, to let me know how serious his injury really was. I had a very similar injury to Jack, except in the opposite side, when my parachute opened, but not as severe. Jack was a man of whom I respected as being a true American soldier and airman. He had completed the twenty-five combat missions that was required, and was waiting at his base in England for a plane to return home. He had earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, with three oak leaf clusters, European Theater Medal, with three battle stars, the Presidential Unit Citation, and other medals and honors. He was asked by his Bomb Group to fly on a crew for one more mission, as this crew lacked one man having a full crew, of ten men, to put another plane over Germany. Jack did not have to go, but after being asked, he volun-

teered for that last, and fateful mission. The mission was nearly completed. They had dropped their bombs, and were on their way back to England. Jack told me that they could see the English Channel, and across it, their destination, England. Their plane was hit and disabled to fly. The whole crew had to parachute from the plane over the Netherlands, which was still held by the Germans. Jack was captured, and spent the same thirteen months as a prisoner-of-war as I. I had made ten missions, and was on my eleventh, when I was shot down. Jack died several years ago. Without a doubt, I am sure his death was a result of his injury, and the Veterans Administration never accepted their responsibility.

One of the things that impressed me, from the beginning to the end of the march, was the presence of the numerous small Catholic shrines. The small buildings were not much over four or six feet square, and about six or seven feet high. Inside the glass front of these buildings were small alters with statues of Mary and the Baby. There were small steps on the fronts of them, where a person could kneel. We had been told that the Germans, under Hitlers' rule had destroyed all of the churches, or any symbol of religion. These shrines and churches were all in Austria, not Germany. The fact of us having slept in a Catholic church the first night out of Stalag 17-B, seeing churches and shrines along the march proved that the distruction of churches in German-held countries to be false.

After we had marched away from Mauthausen, and gotten away from that area, we did not see any more concentration camps, Political, or Jewish prisoners. We did see many forced labor (slaves), but only in small numbers at any area. Most of these laborers were on small farms, and looked as if they had eaten well. The farms usually had some people living there, but most of the towns were very sparse, where people were expected to be living. Where they had gone, I do not know. At one of the small towns that we went through, it was beginning to get late. The guards got permission from the Bergermeister (mayor) of this town for us to stay in his barn. The bergermeister is the most powerful man in any town, and certainly the most respected. After we got settled in his fine barn, he came out to visit with us for a while. We found him to be a very personable person, moreso than most of the ones we encountered. His farm was on the outskirts of the town. Feeling welcome, we would have liked to have spent more time in his barn, the next morning, we moved on south. I have wondered if any lice fell in any of his hay. As we moved on south, we still had no idea where our destination would^e, if it were to be any definite place.

One day, as we were marching, our travels suddenly changed toward the west. This would not have ^{been} so unusual, as sometimes we would make a complete loop, and would come back to a place nearly at the same spot where we had already been. This had happened two or three times, as if we were only stalling for time. This time, we didn't double back, but kept going toward the west. We just followed narrow, winding black-top road. Our destination was still unknown. We had one consolation, we were still going somewhat toward the American lines. We were told by the 82-year Volksturm, who had been a professor in Vienna, that we were entering into the edge of the Black Forest. The professor had become more friendly with us, and would communicate with some of us who had learned some of the German language. When he drank more of his wine, he would become irritated with us younger men, and would not talk with us. I suppose that could have been called a "generation gap". (or rather two generations.)

It seemed that there were four or five days that went by that were very uneventful, as we walked deeper and deeper into the Black Forest. I wondered how many of the men, if any, may have taken their "crystal set" radio on the march. It was hard to get any news of the progress of the war. We didn't know the location of any of the armies, or the direction they were heading - or maybe they had been stopped again, as they had during the Battle of the Bulge. I wondered how the 36th. Division was doing. They were having a terrible battle in Italy, as were the 45th. Division. Before our crew was shot down, we had bombed for both. High altitude bombing was very dangerous for the 36th., as they had so many close, or hand-to-hand combat. If my Dad would have signed a minors release, I would have been in the 36th. Back to the 45th., we bombed the Monte Cassino Abbey for the 45th. I was on that mission. It was March 15, 1944. Since there wasn't much "news" to discuss with my buddies, we trudged along the narrow black-top road, with the tall spruce trees on each side. It seemed that each of us went into our own thoughts. I wondered how my own outfit, the 455th. Bomb Group was doing. I thought of my brother, Weldon, who went to the South Pacific in the coast artillery, back at the first part of 1942. I wondered if he was still island-hopping in the Pacific, or if he could possibly be back home by now. After all, he would have been over there more than three years, now. (As it turned out, he was over there 3½ years. I got home about three months before he did.) Wonder how Mother and Daddy were doing. What would they have to eat today? Our thoughts always turned to food. Nobody was doing much talking, it seemed that we walled-in on all four sides, at times. We couldn't see on each side, and ahead and behind we were walled in, because of the crooked black-top. It was kind of like solitary confinement, except there were so many men among us, and we were completely alone during our solitary confinement. I had seven long days of it. There was down-right boredom, as we kept walking. Where were we going? Would there be food, IF we got there? There was no wonder of why our minds always turned to food. This was the eighteenth day on the march, from Stalag 17-B, and all of the food each of us had eaten was the daily 1/7th. loaf of bread daily, a very small amount of eggs, after it was divided, and that was only once during the eighteen days. Also, one of the men traded for a small amount of potatoes, only once. The parcel of food from the Red Cross contained seven pounds of food; dividing that between seven men, there was only one pound from the parcel. The full bag of apples that I traded, was about three apples each, after we divided them. That is all we had eaten in eighteen days!

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Ahead, we could see a town through the trees! It was about time for some excitement. We went to the edge of this town, and turned southwest. There was a river off to our right, after we turned away from the town. We learned that the town was Braunau, and the river to our right was the Inn river. We marched along the black-top road, sometimes the river was in sight, and sometimes we couldn't see it. At least, it was something to look for. We went along the banks, or near the banks of this river for about seven miles. To our left were stopped thousands of prisoners-of-war, in the open woods. Some had made a lean-to shelter from tree branches, and others were building. The guards turned us into a cleared path, about 10 feet wide, then we were stopped, and we were told that this would be our "home". Bob Leonhard, Bob Matthews and I began making a lean-to shelter for ourselves, trying to finish it before it got dark. We barely finished it, but it wasn't any prize-winner! Surely, we would be liberated soon, as this wasn't much, after eighteen days of marching! At least, we weren't fenced in.

We gathered some smaller branches, and put them on the ground inside our lean-to shelter, for a "mattress". Our shelter was about four or six feet long, or just long enough for us to put blankets inside, to cover up during the nights, which we knew were going to be cold. We built a fire, as there was plenty of wood to burn. Boy, did it ever feel good! We went to others to try to find out if they knew where our "liberators" were. Nobody seemed to know, as well as we could find out that night. It got cold, and we sat around our fire with our overcoats on, trying to stay warm. We finally crawled into our newly made shelter, for a night's sleep. After all, it did turn out to be an exciting day. I don't remember what we used for pillows. We probably used our own arms for the first night, then tried for something better for the second. After all, I still had my pants-leg bag, which had come in so handy. Maybe if I could find some dry sand tomorrow, I would make a pillow with it. I don't remember if that is what I did, or not. It was cold and crowded under our shelter, but it seems that we slept very well the first night. During the night, I got cold. I looked out, and there was a good warm-looking fire burning in the opening of the woods. I crawled out of my blankets, and slipped over to the fire, but there were only German guards. I crept closer, maybe they would not notice me. I began to sit down by the guards, and "soak-up" some of the warm fire. They noticed me, and I think all of them turned angrily at me, and let me know that I was not welcome. I went back to the lean-to and crawled under the blankets, and overcoat. We always slept with all of our clothes on, during all of the march, and the nights to follow, as we slept under our lean-to. That wasn't anything unusual, as we had to sleep with all of our clothes on, during the cold winter at Stalag 17-B. We had definitely become accustomed to doing it. I tried to go to sleep, thinking of the days we had spent on the march, and wondering what we would have for breakfast tomorrow. None of the three of us, the three "Bobs" had one bite of food between us, that night. (Bob Leonhard, Bob Matthews and Bob Black) During WW-2, I was known as only Bob, Black, or Blackie. None knew me as Vannoy. When I got back to Mexia, I had to get accustomed to being called Vannoy, again, after three years.

I have not written any of this to try to put any accent on our intense hunger, or any fear of being shot by any of the guards, when they became enraged from any of our actions, or from having constantly drunk too much of their wine. I have been asked the question, "where did you get your drinking water?" Our march was not the same as "the Bataan Death March", as they were constantly marching in intense heat, as well as their hunger, without any water or food. While we were on our march, we hardly ever experienced any days that were actually warm. Most of the days and nights were from cool to freezing cold, as well as the usual drizzling rain, therefore we didn't have much problem with thirst, only hunger. We obtained our drinking water, as we were going through the small villages. With the guards rushing us back on the march, and 500 men trying to get a drink, we never had time to drink as much water as needed. In the evenings, or night before we had to go into the barns, we drank water in the barnyards, as was drunk by the livestock. The guards told us that "water would make us "kronk" (sick), but there was no alternative.