

SHOT DOWN AND TAKEN PRISONER.

The Battle Order was posted in the Mess each day; if your name was on it you were flying that night. Some hours later you are standing in a field of corn, one hundred miles inside Germany thinking "What the hell do I do now?".

It was the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1944 and the target was FRANKFURT - 398 Lancasters were detailed for the attack – the last major bombardment of the War on Frankfurt.

We flew low level across France, starting our climb when we got to the German border, the first turning point being to the North of Mannheim and that is whjere we got attacked, first from the rear then from underneath which was when they hit the bomb-bay and set a load of incendiaries on fire.

Norman struggled to keep the aircraft level but when the fire spread to the port wing he gave the order to bale out. The Flight Engineer was first out, then myself followed by the Bomb-aimer; the two gunners baled out through the rear door. I

guess we were about 12,000 feet when we baled out.

When I looked around I spied part of a parachute up a tree in a corner of the field; this proved to be our Flight Engineer (B.J.) who was on the ground. I headed over to him, helped to tug the parachute free then we buried both our chutes and Maewests.

We took the decision to walk out of Germany and head toward Alsace Lorraine. So we headed in a south west direction, keeping to fields. As dawn came we found ourselves on the banks of a strong flowing river with a bridge downstream; across the river was a heavily wooded area which looked most inviting but we decided to stay where we were. Behind us were some farm buildings but unless anyone came up to the river bank we could not be seen.

The day passed slowly. We took stock of what we had – one escape kit containing Horlicks tablets, a chewy bar, a water bottle and purification tablets, a fishing line with hook. B.J smoked a pipe and had a tobacco pouch

containing a map of France and I had compass; we also had some cigarettes and personal effects. Time passed slowly but we risked one cigarette between us and ate a couple of our energy (Horlicks) tablets.

As night came so too did the rain and how it rained. We made our way to the bridge, got safely across, and dived in to the woods to seek some shelter. We remained there for most of the night and towards dawn started to make our way staying within the wood but following the road. Occasionally a military vehicle would pass along what proved to be a main road. After a few hours we decided to rest, found a clump of low scrub, bedded down and went to sleep.

Up to this point food was not of great concern; we still had some concentrated food tablets and a chewy bar, matches, a water bottle and water purification tablets.

Later that afternoon we decided to start walking again, keeping within the woods and following the road which seemed to be heading in the right direction. As it got darker we decided to walk on

the road in an endeavour to make more progress; the road was fairly straight and we could hear any approaching traffic, whereupon we would dive in to the wood.

We continued walking through the night and as daylight came we found we were nearing open country, with a few buildings set well back from the road. Then we had some good fortune by coming across apple trees growing alongside the road; we filled our pockets and made our way across a field towards an old barn which we approached with caution; it seemed to be disused so we went in, climbed a ladder to the hayloft where we took turns at sleeping and keeping watch. During one of my watch periods I came across some old newspapers; looking through them I came across a map, part of a petrol company's advert, which covered the area we were in. I ripped it out and put it in my pocket.

Feeling refreshed, we ate some of the apples and as dusk fell we set off once again. So far as I could judge we had covered some 40 miles and were heading in the direction of Karlsruhe. We still kept to fields and woods in an attempt to

remain invisible. Again it rained and we sought shelter under a bridge over an autobahn, high enough not to be seen.

As daylight came we abandoned our sheltered spot and made for the fields to continue our walk and decided to keep walking during the day. This was a day we would not forget in a hurry. At one point we could see workers in a field but if they saw us they took no notice. To speed our progress we took to walking along a quiet country road. Some miles on we spotted a civilian truck parked by the roadside. There did not appear to be anyone with it so we approached it carefully. BJ had the idea we might be able to use it progress our journey but we abandoned that idea. Looking inside we spotted a package lying beside the driver's seat; we found it contained two slabs of bread and some sausage; and that was our lunch for the day. I wonder what the driver thought about his missing lunch.

The decision to keep to the road was almost our downfall, for turning a bend in the road a few miles further on we saw ahead a group of houses on either side of the road, and worse still there

were one or two women and some children on the road. It seemed that they had seen us so what to do? We decided to braise it out and walked on, and as we passed the group we nodded to them and kept going at a normal pace. Another bend in the road took us out of sight of the women.

We stepped up our pace to get as far away from the houses as possible. Later on we we came across a workman's hut by the roadside; it seemed deserted so we decided to rest inside for a while. There was a knot in the wood on the disefacing the road and we could keep a lookout on

anything passing. Then the unexpected happened: an army truck drew up alongside, the driver got down and a woman appeared from the other side. They walked towards the hut but passed it and went in to the woods. Ten minutes they reappeared, got back in to the truck and drove off. If they were satisfied so were we!

That was enough excitement for the day, so we vacated the hut and kept to the fields and woods for the rest of the day, and chose to spend the night as "babes in the wood" once again.

As we started out the next day it was obvious that we were lacking adequate nourishment. We both felt light headed, were walking slower and taking longer rests in between. We needed another lorry with bread and sausage!

We kept going and hoped for the best and it came to us in the shape of a field of potatoes. We filled our pockets, adding the spuds to the few apples we still had. As darkness fell we were still walking along a country road when we came across another hut set back from the road. This would be a good spot to rest and when we entered it we found it had a stove, so BJ went off to collect wood while I headed to a stream to fill our water bottle. Roasted potatoes followed by the apples was a more than adequate for our evening meal. Before retiring I went outside to relieve myself and to my horror there were flames spouting out of the chimney. We doused the fire before going to sleep.

The next morning was sunny and warm and we resumed our walk, although by this time we were off the map I had found but we reckoned we were



still going in the right direction. We walked throughout the day and as evening came we found ourselves on the outskirts of a town. We sheltered until it was properly dark then ventured in to the town; we were wondering if we should continue when we heard footsteps coming in our direction so we dived in to a garden and hid behind a hedge until the individual passed. We decided to investigate a bit further and came to a railway marshalling yard.

Would there be any goods trains that might take us out of Germany? We never got the answer to that question as we were suddenly confronted by a uniformed person who took a great interest in us. He spoke to us, obviously asking questions which we could not understand so we just shrugged our shoulders. Bemused, perhaps, our questioner appeared to lose interest and wandered off so we too took off, abandoned the yard and decided to get out of town as fast as we could.- a town we later learned was called Rastatt, and close to the Rhine.

We cleared the town and walked as fast as we could down a country road. We kept going for a good few miles then, as it was nearing dawn, we



decided to rest up in a wood to our right. We found a sheltered spot and settled down to sleep.

BJ shook my shoulders and said "Looking whose coming". I sat up and saw four soldiers with rifled bearing down on us. A short distamnnee away an elderly man stood watching the proceedings. He had obviously spotted us and told the military, but he didn't have to go far for we had gone sleep about a hundred yards from an army camp we could not see in the dark.

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We were taken back to the camp, ourshoes were removed and we were left standing on the spot until a couple of Officers arrived. They seemed slightly amused at our predicament but neither spoke English. Eventually a horse and cart arrived, we were put on board with two guards and taken back into Rastatt where we were lodged in the County jail in separate cells. After

about an hour the door opened and an Officer entered with an NCO who snapped at me "English?". I said "No", where upon he said "Ah, American?". Again I said "No" at which point the Officer said in good English "Well, if you are not English nor American what are you?" to which I relied "Scottish". The Officer then turned to the NCO and, said a few words and the NCO left the cell.

I found it strange that the Officer did not ask me questions. Instead he told me that the was an Austrian and had been educated at Oxford pre-war. The NCO then returned bearing a tray with a dish of meat and potatoes, a slab of bread and a mug of coffee, then they left me. When I later met our Flight Engineer I told him of my experience; he said the two had come in to his cell. The NCO had snapped "English" to which he relied "Yes" and they left him; he did not get anything to eat until lunchtime. So it paid to be Scottish!

The "English" Flying Officer and our move to Dulag Luft.