

OCTOBER 1943

The 'Memoire' of Sgt. Harry J Whitwell

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner;

50 Sdn. RAF



At 23.04 hrs. on 8th October, 1943, Lancaster aircraft DV324 took off from RAF Skellingthorpe, near Lincoln to take part in a night-bombing raid over Hanover.

The aircraft, VN-N (Nas), was brand new, having been delivered to the squadron just 3 or 4 days before. That night it would be manned by members of 50 Sqn whose usual aircraft, (Z-Zebes), was unserviceable.

It was the aircraft's first 'op' and last flight.

The crew:

Pilot Officer	J C P	TAYLOR	Pilot & Captain	POW
Flying Officer	S D	STUBBS	Bomb Aimer	POW
Warrant Officer	W	ROCKTHOLD	Rear Gunner	Killed
Warrant Officer	J S	GRAY	Mid-upper Gunner	POW
Flight Sergeant	J	HANDLEY	Flight Engineer	POW
Sergeant	P W	DOCK	Navigator	Killed
Sergeant	H J	WHITWELL	Wireless Operator +	POW



The author, H J Whitwell

Probably taken during training (on '5g' insignia on 'Blower')

The following pages are the actual words of Harry Whitwell, written whilst he was a POW, but with some editing of his, erratic grammar and punctuation.

I think probably the best thing to do before relating my experiences after leaving dear old England on that fateful 'op' on Friday the eighth of October 1943 is to give the names etc. of my crew, so here goes:-

John Charles Peter/Philip Taylor, the skipper of our aircraft, 'N' for Nan, was a Pilot Officer (P/O). He was only recently commissioned. We nicknamed him JCP and he was a Londoner.

Stewart Souths, the bomb aimer, hailed from Hertfordshire. Nicknamed 'Stubby,' he was a Flying Officer (F/O) and, along with JCP, the only 'officer' members of the crew.

James Gray the mid-upper gunner was a South African, though he lived in Rhodesia. Jimmy was a Warrant Officer (W/O)

William Beckhold the nose-gunner came from Canada he was also a W/O, we called him 'Canada'

Our own Navigator was Fred Burton whose home town was Winchester and he held the rank of Flight Sergeant (F/S).

Joseph Handley the Flight Engineer was also a F/S and, like myself, belonged to the County of 'Broad Acres' Otley being his home town.

Yours truly the Wireless Operator/Air Gunner was a humble Sergeant of 9 months standing, my home being at York.

We had been very busy for the past eleven days operating on Hanover twice, Hagen, Borchum, Munich and Frankfurt and we were all looking forward to the 'Stand down.'

On the morning of Friday the eighth of October I felt pretty rough, having a bad cold and throat. Joe advised me to report sick but I held on thinking today would be the beginning of the Stand-down as the moon was well up. Freddy the navigator was grounded, (lucky for him), his ears were giving trouble

We were soon to learn that we were 'on' that night and did an air test

Our navigator for the night was a young fellow who had just returned from leave. His own skipper was unfit. I can't remember his name.

Our usual 'kike,' 'Z' for Zebra, was unserviceable with engine trouble. This old strager, although being the eldest one on the squadron, was always lucky for us; we had flown in her the last 5 trips. She was a grind climber and, although being rather untidy inside, we were very attached to her. We were given 'N' for Nan in her place; a brand new model and this was to be her first Operation.

Briefing time soon came around and Jay gave us the 'gen.' Hanover was to be visited once again. This meant a six hour trip at least. Soon, we got the main briefing and was checked and told to run through it ourselves; we were being given more 'gen' from the Wing Commander and Group Captain.

The Group captain wished us best luck and away we all went to get our specialist tackle and back to a hurried 'ops tea.' This being over, we boarded the transport to the locker rooms to collect our chutes, harness, mae weats and other flying clothing. I have a warm position in the aircraft; therefore, the only flying clothing I took along was my flying boots.

Andy, our transport friend, had the bus waiting. Little did we think we were not to see him again and we were soon whisked away with our ungainly load of 'gen' etc. to 'N' for Nan. Very shortly we clambered aboard her and got all our stuff carefully positioned and visually checked the equipment and 'J' and Joe warned up the engines.

Then we got our mae-weats harnesses and chutes fixed on and got out to stretch our legs and chat to the ground crews who were patting the final touches to her. As the time drew near to take off we clambered aboard once again and soon the engines were 'revving' up and we were taxiing along the runway.

We were about one minute late in take-off but had plenty of time to spare to gain height over base. When 10,000 feet was reached and everything rechecked in the air and found to be satisfactory our oxygen was turned on by Joe and we fitted on the now familiar mask. Course was set on schedule and we set ourselves as comfortably as possible for the trip ahead. The navigator did his job slight as did everyone else in the crew, the engines were behaving well and we soon reached 20,000 feet and kept joking away to each other every so often and in fact all went without incident.

Up came the tracking flares and on approaching the target Jimmy drew our attention to the PFF flares. We went in and 'Soubby' began the commentary for the bombing run. The time then would be approximately 00.45, when I noticed the radio had gone off. The first thing was to check my fuses. This meant opening up a panel on the starboard side of the a/c and in doing this duty I pulled my intercom plug out of its socket. I am used to being off the a/c, being a W/Op so did not worry as I knew it wouldn't be a long job.

While engaged thus I felt a violent lurch and the plane took a terrific dive, I was thrown upwards towards the roof and for some time was powerless to do anything. I knew by the feel of this we had been hit. The a/c pulled out to a certain extent, and I observed the escape door in the nose was open and bodies were leaving hurriedly. I then saw the captain leave.

All this time the navigator had not warned me of the 'abandon aircraft' call, but looked dumbfounded and powerless to move. The smell of burning and fumes was very strong and although the engines appeared to be functioning OK they were revved down and I was able to go forward and shout to tell him to grab his chute and jump for it. His chute was behind the chair propped on the starboard side, I observed no fires on board. I then moved to the W/Op's seat and grabbed my parachute. I then remembered the IFF so hurriedly put down my chute and pressed the buttons to explode the IFF and Navigators Aid. Of course, I wasn't sure the navigator & pilot's positions were so 'live.'

The next thing was to get my chute and clip it on. This proved a tricky job as the 'G' was pretty bad now, being unable to hold the chute and clip it on this way, I moved to the navigator's position, placed my parachute on his table and manoeuvred myself so clipping the chute on. All this time my thoughts had been on the speed the plane was moving earthwards. I knew we must be very near the 'deck' now. I shouted once again to my navigator, telling him to get his own chute on and I then moved forward towards the escape hatch. The navigator then rushed at me, without his chute, and grabbed the lower part of my body shouting, "I want to go down with you!"

I had no time to argue but jumped with him clinging to me. After a few seconds I pulled the rip-cord and the chute opened, halting my

downward descent considerably, but at the same time the jolt had flung the navigator off, almost certainly to his death, as the height I estimated to be 200 to 250 feet. If he had acted calmly, he would have had ample time to escape OK, as he must have been warned well in advance by the Captain.

I felt a sharp pain in my right little finger, also my left ear seemed to have gone deaf on me. My feelings at this juncture were very scattered, it seemed as though I was in a bad dream. I pulled myself together and realized I was not dreaming but slowly approaching German territory. Fields, roads, hedges etc. were rapidly racing towards me. Soon, a pond seemed my destination but I pulled my harness on one side and managed to steer myself to land; or should I say splash in the shallow part. I was glad to get down as there was still a fair amount of heavy and light 'flak' also searchlights about and I did not want peppering.

I found out later from members of my crew that, as we were levelling up to take our photograph, we were attacked and hit in the port petrol tanks by Ju88s. I had not of course heard a word from my skipper up there on account of the i/c plug being out. We had, however, dropped our bombs which was a good thing. I had dropped away from the main blaze and although the sky was a red glow only a few cottages were burning around me. It appeared to be out in the country-side where I had dropped. I found I was in a big garden or park surrounded by barbed wire. I could hear the sound of voices and the barking of dogs in the distance, though I was tensed up and listened as best I could with the good ear for fear they had seen my descent but the voices didn't seem to be coming my way. I clambered out of the pond and then silently gathered in the chute, took off the harness and mae-west. I had been fortunate in one respect as I still retained my flying boots. I kept listening every few seconds and heard voices and also saw bicycle lamps approaching on a road which passed by. I kept very quiet until they had passed. By this time the drone of the bombers were fading away, the gunfire was subsiding and the searchlights were going out one by one. I judged the time to be approx. 01.10. I ripped a big chunk off my parachute with the aid of my knife also took the torch out of my mae-west. My right hand little finger was bleeding profusely so I tore off a strip of silk and roughly

bandaged it. It was pretty painful also my ear was still affected. I felt very anxious of those more fortunate crews homeward bound to a warm meal and then to bed.

My next job was to scoop out a hole in the soft earth and so bury my tackle. I got my stuff over carefully to a spot that was hidden from the road and would afford good cover from passers-by on the road. By the way, a good thick hedge skirted the road which was all to the good. I soon silently scooped out a hole and gathered in my chute as tightly as possible and along with the harness, mae-west and cap I buried. The next thing was to carefully find a good spot to get out of the place. I got over the barbed wire entanglement with some difficulty. This done, I found I was in a big field of sugar beet with a wood in the distance. There was a road at right-angles to the other road. The noise of people chattering and barking dogs also lights flickering, presumably bicycles. The lights of blazing Hanover made the landscape comparatively clear; the gunfire and searchlights had now picked up. I swung out to the right as far as possible to keep clear of the road. There were 3 or 4 barns ablaze quite nearby so I then and there decided the best thing to do would be to go into the wood and get a few hours sleep if possible and carry on about 04.00 o'clock, also to get my thoughts collected and organize my next move. I was about to enter this wood when I thought searchers were about as a light kept flickering in and out intermittently. This certainly shook me; I immediately threw myself down and waited a few minutes but the light seemed to be in one position so I ventured forward and discovered it to be an almost burnt out incendiary bomb. Into the wood I went and I soon found a hollowed out piece of ground not before a lot of stumbling around so I decided to bunk down there for a spell. Although I was wet and miserable, I did manage to get to sleep. I slept longer than I had intended; cold and my feet will wet.

It was getting light and must have been about 05.00 Saturday morning. The weather conditions were cold but dry. I then got up and decided to survey the wood. It was quite small. I got near the edge and before I realized what was happening, 3 men appeared. They were uniformed and armed, though I didn't know to which organization they belonged. They gathered round me and one said in broken English that I was to follow them. I was led over to the road and ...

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.....smeared with ersatz honey also a cup of ersatz coffee which I thought tasted pretty terrible, a few sips of the coffee and half slice of bread was enough for me. They were amazed that I didn't have it all. Very shortly I was told to put on my boots as I was to go to Hanover. Two guards appeared and then I began a walk of about 5 miles to the town. Two guards each armed with rifles. It was then that I observed the enormous damage that we had done on this and previous raids; it seemed as though nothing had escaped and every other building was down or badly damaged by either explosives or incendiaries. We passed through a village on the way and the local fire fighters were busy. I felt pretty uncomfortable as the Germans kept glaring at me and uttering words of abuse, though I was not molested at all. When Hanover bore into sight, the damage was even more extensive; chaps were busy working away on the gutted and smouldering buildings. My thoughts at this time were the sooner I get away inside some building the better for me. I was finally handed over to some Luftwaffe man at a building. They required the cause of our plane being shot down, whether 'Ack-Ack' or fighters.

This, of course, I did not know and told them so. Two more guards were summoned and away we went again through the main streets, parks etc. for at least 3 miles. Looses cars and powered vehicles constituted a very small part of the traffic and even on these large tanks fitted in the rear showed them to be run by gas, but there were many bicycles on the roads. As earlier, I came in for much abuse and I got used to it and paid no attention. I was also impressed by the sad, unhappy looks of the people. The civilian clothes were poor and old fashioned compared to our standards. Uniforms of many types and colour were very evident and the 'wasstika' emblem kept popping up here and there. The German uniforms seemed, to my idea, very theatrical looking.

At this point my feet were beginning to trouble me and I wondered how much further I had to go to get to my final destination. We eventually arrived at a big building which I took to be a kind of 'Information Bureau' shepherded inside, and told to wait. Many uniformed men both Officer and NCO types were constantly coming

in and going out also lots of 'civvies.' This too had suffered, many Luftwaffe men were clearing debris away. During this time many spoke to me enquiring my nationality etc. After about one hour's wait, along came a Luftwaffe officer. He spoke good English; he said 'the war was over for me and I was lucky to be alive.' He also said, 'what a beautiful place Hanover had been before the damage.' I was taken into a nice car with him; an NCO was driving it. We seemed to go round the busy main parts again.

The damage was everywhere, some of the roads were littered with debris about a foot deep, it was impossible to drive the car through. Eventually we arrived at a building and he got out and went inside. After about 5 minutes or so he came out again and away we drove to land up at an Aerodrome.

He handed me over to the officer in charge and then I was conducted to a solitary cell with a wooden bed, a small table and stool. A very small barred window was the means of ventilation; the door had a peep hole in the centre. The time I estimated to be 04.30. I was also given 2 blankets and although there were only hard boards to lie on, I settled down and was soon fast asleep. I was shortly awakened and taken to a waiting van where along with two German guards was seated a Canadian Pilot Officer pilot. I noticed both his eyes were swollen and discoloured; on attempting to speak to each other we were 'hushed' by the guards. I thought maybe the 'Canuck' had been manhandled, but later learnt he had sustained these injuries before leaving his aircraft. We started off, working our way through side streets, and the town was very soon left behind and after about seven or eight minutes arrived at another big place. This may have been the buildings of an aerodrome. Out we climbed to move into a big modern building.

All our personal things and identity discs were taken from us after a thorough search. Each article, and my six shillings in English money, was checked and listed and we were each made to sign our names and serial numbers on the list. We were next taken to another guardroom with similar cells to the last place, except that there was heating laid on. I was ushered into one of these cells and given 2 slices of German bread and margarine with 'ersatz' coffee for drink. Being very hungry, I soon consumed this, they also gave me a couple of blankets, the

guards were pretty decent and spoke to me in broken English. I asked to have my injured finger dressed and shortly after came an orderly and dressed it; though it looked to me a trifle septic. I was allowed to visit the latrine and after this got down on the rough wooden bed and was soon asleep. The next morning being Sunday, I was awakened by the guard and given the usual couple of slices of bread with honey this time, and also the coffee. The time the guard showed me was 08.00. After my sparse meal, I thought I heard the voice of my captain; it seemed as though he was at the toilet so I let out a yell and he gleefully acknowledged me. Soon after I was allowed to go to the toilet and there had a quick wash with crate soap. While so engaged I heard Joe's voice also that of 'Jimmy' but was restrained from calling out to them. It certainly was a relief to know that 4 of us, at least, were OK. I returned to the cell and heard someone tapping Morse code on the wall but was unable to read this. The time passed slowly as there was nothing to occupy ones time, at about 12 O'clock the guard came in again and beaming all over his face said, 'Comrade, good German even.' He was carrying a plate containing a yellow looking concoction (very funny) which contained potatoes, fat scraps and some vegetables; it looked as though it had all been cooked up together. I did not eat much although I was hungry but asked for a glass of water, or 'wasser' as it is called by the Germans. He brought some in. I passed the rest of the day until about 18.00 hours by walking about the small cell. Occasionally the guard would appear and chat away in broken English they appeared pretty decent fellows. At approximately 18.00 hours I was given my couple of slices of bread and margarine, also crate coffee. I visited the toilet and then got down on the crate bed and was soon asleep. I awoke about eight o'clock, this of course being Monday, and then the guard brought a my breakfast and said, 'all the Englanders and myself were going to Frankfurt that afternoon.' I was very glad to hear this and hoped it would be the end of our confinement. I next was allowed to have a rough wash and awaited impatiently for afternoon. Around about midday the guard brought in the same type of dinner as the previous day and on enquiry he said at about 15.00 hours we would be moving and that I was to take along the bread rations for the whole journey. We were to arrive at our destination about 10.30, Tuesday. An hour or so later I was told to come along and taken to a room and there was JCP, Jim and Joe; also

the Canadian P/O and a New Zealand W/Op AG. I then realized how scruffy I must look when I saw them, long tousled hair and quite a growth of the old face fungus. They all seemed unhurt except for minor cuts. JCP had lost his flying boots, Joe was minus one boot, but Jimmy had all intact.

About six guards and a sergeant were in charge of us, they carried a kind of sub-machine gun each; also some large leather bags which I guessed contained our personal things. We were shepherded into an awaiting bus, with the guards at strategic points and sat down, we were allowed to smoke. The bus started off and soon we were outside Hanover suburbs to finally stop at a small railway station; probably the reason why we didn't go to the Hanover main station was on account of damage to same. We all got off and through to a platform. I felt sorry for JCP walking around in his stocking feet, Joe too was inconvenienced. The station was quite busy, trains coming and going, also many troops of all types were around and civilians. We were of course the object of attention although no demonstrations were made.

The sergeant, or 'under officer' as he is known, in charge of the party got us a drink of the familiar coffee. After waiting for about thirty or forty minutes, our train pulled in and we clambered aboard the carriages by the way appear to be second and third class in Germany. Jimmy, the New Zealander and myself with guard were in one compartment while JCP, Joe and the Canadian were in another with their guards. I must say the guards were very good on route, chatting and giving us food and apples. We stopped at quite a number of stations and were handed large cardboard mugs containing crate coffee. This seems a common practice in Germany, the people appeared to be very appreciative to the armed forces.

We arrived at Frankfurt Main about 23.55 and marched to a big building on the station like an enquiry office. Upstairs, we found a very big room with rough beds on which were laid hundreds of American Army Air Corps. We were amazed to find such a lot of 'Yankers'; many were wounded. There seemed a sprinkling of RAF here too; about half a dozen I should think. A few guards were posted about us. Having no alternative, we got down on the ground and though cold and uncomfortable, I was soon in the 'land of nod.'

It was nearly 06.30 and Tuesday morning when we were awakened and taken to a waiting train which we boarded, though previous to this the order officer got us a drink each. Very soon the train started and within fifteen minutes we arrived at a small station.

The Americans were abused too and we all got out helping the wounded on to lorries. We all got on these lorries eventually and away we went again to arrive after about twenty minutes at a small group of wooden buildings heavily wired around with barbed wire. We went inside a small ablation. I took the opportunity to get a wash of a sort minus soap. The next thing was that a guard took our names, ranks and numbers. After this we were called for singly and thoroughly stripped and searched in another room by an equivalent of our W/O. of course, escape aids were what he was after. He seemed satisfied with me and away I went.

Regarding the Americans it appeared that a number had been POWs in Italy and the majority had been shot down on day raids over Germany very recently. I was struck by the very large number who had baled out of the 'forts' injured or otherwise. I would say 90% compared to only 10% of our crews. Of course 'baling out' in the daylight is a much simpler matter than the same operation at night time which I think partly accounts for this.

I was taken to another room and the door was locked. The size of this was about 10 feet by 8 feet and contained the usual rough bed and table. On the bed was sat an RAF Sergeant A/G. He had been here two days and was getting 'cheered off' on his own and was only too glad to have someone to speak to. Apparently, it had been his first operation on Hanover and he was the only member of his crew alive. I felt sorry for him for we at least could say we had hit the enemy good and hard. Soon after this another RAF Sergeant A/G came in, he was cut about the face and also had shrapnel splinters in his left leg; he was only too glad to get laid down on the bed.

Four Americans were the next visitors and by now the small room was becoming rather crowded although it was much better than solitary. We spent the time chatting away and grumbling about our bad fortune until approximately 12 o'clock when a guard brought us dinner, which consisted of 5 unskinned potatoes each. There were also a glass of

herb tea a terribly testing concoction. We spent the rest of the afternoon quietly. About 17.00 hours a guard entered and called the injured RAF fellow and myself over and said we were moving. We then went out into the passage and I saw JCP and Joe among a bunch of Americans with some of our boys too. Jimmy was not there and I wondered what had happened to him.

We soon were formed up and began a move of about half a mile to come eventually to a large collection of newer wooden buildings. The injured were helped along by the fir men as best they could someone said this was the place we were to be interrogated. After a short wait in one of the rooms our names were called singly and I landed up in another small confined room. The same furniture as previously I found inside.

By this time it must have been turned 18.00 hours and growing dark. I was given a couple of blankets and decided to try to get some sleep. I was just getting drowsy when the guard came in and grabbed my flying boots and slammed the door again.

The usual fare as before was given me the next day which was Wednesday.

The time certainly dragged as there was absolutely nothing to occupy ones mind, but on the Thursday afternoon I was visited by a German Officer who produced a form and wanted to know my home town my trade etc. also the names of members of my crew though I did not tell him the first queries he told me the names of JCP, Joe and Jimmy and I wrote them down on his form.

About thirty minutes after he went away another chap came along with a list for the clothing etc. I had. I guessed the time to be 16.00 hours when I was asked to follow a guard and soon found myself in a big room with maps, routes etc. on the walls and a good fire burning.

Seated at a desk was a 'big shot' Luftwaffe Intelligence Officer. I know now this was an interrogation Centre. He was a cultured looking fellow and asked me to be seated also offered me a cigarette. He soon got down to brass tacks and said that I was to give him answers to questions he already knew so that he could satisfy himself I was not a saboteur or spy.

I of course, referred him to my identity disc, uniform etc. and said that I wouldn't be in the present unhappy state if I was a spy. Anyway he went on to ask me questions regarding training leading up to the Squadron Commanders etc. I answered a few wrongly and he got wild and said that he would keep me confined quite a time and then bring me back again for questioning. He told me quite a lot of things about the squadron that was correct. He had a big book with lots of 'gen' on my squadron, the Wing Commander & Flight Commander's names. He also mentioned the name of a surviving member of a crew lost earlier. I was led back to the cell very depressed. I certainly was not looking forward to another spell in my little room. I got back but along came another fellow; he wanted a list of my clothing also my description; height, weight colouring etc. all of which he tabulated.

He then said to my great relief, 'you are leaving, collect your blankets and give them to me.' I did this very soon and away to a room where I found among lots of Americans and a fair number of RAF chaps JCP, Joe and late on Jimmy came. Here we retrieved our personal property. I was minus my keys and key ring, also my six shillings English money but did not worry about this. We were given our food ration and formed up and marched away to an awaiting bus minus Jimmy once again. The bus did not have seats so we all squatted down on the floor. Guards armed with sub-machine guns watched over us. We were soon on the move; by this time the moon was up and lighted up everything, we soon reached Frankfurt town and we were surprised to feel the bus pulling up in it seemed to us the centre of Frankfurt. We got out and a fair sized encampment ringed with barbed wire confronted us quite a few buildings were under construction. We were counted & then moved into the place then we were given a small towel and a packet of 20 French cigarettes by the RAF staff. After this we went into one of the large huts each contained about 20 small rooms with a fireplace, table, cupboards and five two-decker beds in each room. These we discovered would house 10 men each there was also ablutions and latrine in each hutment. Well, I must say this place had a very heartening effect on us. We bunked down for the night looking forward to the morrow when we were to receive new red cross underclothes also a box of toilet articles, then we would get to work and have a shower and remove all the face fungus.

About 08.00 next morning Friday, we went down to the cookhouse mess and had a big cup of tea with lots of milk and sugar also two slices of German bread and butter with jam. We were told that all the Red Cross parcels were 'pooled' and put into three good meals and cooked by a permanent staff of British NCOs. The chocolate and cigarettes, fifty by the way, were given to the men on Saturdays. We thought it a grand idea; this meant all except bread, potatoes with a small amount of sugar and margarine was provided by the Red Cross.

There was a small library on the camp which, in daylight, turned out to be a very small camp and 'transit' only but we really thought it was like heaven compared to the other place. The toilet articles were soap and soap container, tooth brush and container, hair comb, toothpaste, shaving cream, Gillette razor with three blades and a housewife. We also received one pair of underpants, vest, shirt and socks. Later, we received 1 greatcoat and one pair of boots. All these were provided by the American Red Cross.

A small sick-bay or 'bevier' was installed on the camp and so I went along every other day and had my injured finger dressed. There was parades at 09.00 hours also 17.00 hours otherwise we had no duties; in fact we had too much time on our hands. Americans kept arriving and going almost every day; to regular camps of course. The RAF personnel came along very slowly, consequently we had a fortnights stay at the place before we were sufficiently strong to move along.

Jimmy had arrived later on Thursday night and Stubby turned up on the Sunday worse for wear, but unharmed; he had been caught in his bid to escape. He was of course overjoyed to see us. We chatted with different fellows and learnt that some had been months on the loose before being finally picked up. We volunteered to go to the railway station at Frankfurt to collect Red Cross Parcels, it passed the time, the exercise was good also one had the opportunity to see the town and folks. Frankfurt was a pretty big town but the streets were deserted of people compared to towns of a like size in England. The folks looked under-nourished and depressed. We had been at Frankfurt about 8 days when at night the sirens sounded. All lights were extinguished and very soon the sound of heavy bombers were heard. It was our boys and the 'Ack-Ack' opened up in no uncertain manner, the searchlights too, were numerous.

Soon the familiar PFF flares were dropped, green and reds and instead of seeing them from above we now saw how effective they were from the ground. Of course, we expected to hear and feel the 'cookies' dropping anytime now but as it turned out nothing happened good for us it was a 'spoo' and certainly had its effect. One four engine a/c away to the west was coned and held by the searchlights right across the sky but although they pumped up everything they had he seemed to escape alright. We kept ourselves occupied at Dulag Luft as it was called by walking also reading and using the tops of our flying boots to make mittens, caps etc. Jimmy & Joe used an Irving jacket to line the insides of their bundle dress. We had been at Dulag about 8 days when we lost JCP and Stubby; they left with the Officers to a place near Berlin. We had been there a fortnight when our names were put on the next posting list of British NCOs to Mühlburg situated between Leipzig and Dresden. Berlin was about forty miles away to the north. By this time over sixty of us had accumulated.

It was Wednesday afternoon when we left Dulag Luft, first we were searched and all war booty was seized. I gave my mittens to an American so they would not fall into German hands. Some of the party managed to secrete articles away cunningly and got by the close scrutiny of the guards. The Officer in charge also gave a short speech in which we were warned on the consequences of escape. He also said we were not to converse with any of the civilian populace. These warnings proved unnecessary as can be soon seen.

We moved off and together with an armed guard boarded a train. After a short while we climbed off and marched to a goods yard. It would be approximately 18.00 and getting dusk and we waited until 3 cattle trucks were shunted in. We noticed these trucks were large enough to hold eighteen horses. Snow was placed in them and we had a terrible shock when we were informed that forty-three had to go on one of the trucks and forty-two in the other also two guards. Our boots were taken from us and, along with the guards, were housed in the third truck. We each received one Red Cross English parcel. Jimmy was in charge of the rationing of German food etc. An unthankful job I must say. The guards boarded up all openings, not that there was any likelihood of us escaping minus our boots. We were two nights confined to this and arrived at Mühlburg about

midday Friday. It really was an awful experience as at night time we had to lay as best we could propped against each other, it being practically impossible to relieve stiff cramped limbs. The guards too changed over every hour and this caused more trouble not to mention them letting in the cold night air. The lighting consisted of a broken lamp with a night light placed inside. The toilet arrangements were bad too. The reason given by the Germans why we travelled this way was that they were so badly off for railway carriages. On reaching Mühlburg which proved to be a small village we clambered out and were given back our boots. Next we were crammed and marched in fives to the camp which was two to three miles from the station.

The wounded were put on a cart and dragged by some British 'Tommys' who eagerly enquired from us the latest 'gen' from Blighty. They also gave us some idea of the camp which wasn't very encouraging.

Up to this point I have refrained from giving any idea of the weather conditions in Germany since landing. Well, every day without break had been fine, sunny and practically rainless. We arrived at the camp after about forty minutes, lugging our belongings, sweating and thirsty. Dust seemed to be everywhere. The camp was a big one surrounded by walls of barbed wire and high sentry boxes placed every three hundred yards or so with a search light in each. Electric lamps were spaced about seventy yards apart too.

We arrived at the entrance to find this was STAMLAGER IVB. We were re-counted and handed over to our new keepers and away went the old guard. I had left untouched my Red Cross Parcel, not knowing when the next issue would be. Then away we went to land up in a big compound and told to wait further orders. We were certainly glad to get a rest as it had been a hot and dusty walk. The next thing was to scrounge some water as we were all longing for a drink. Eventually we noticed a building near at hand and managed a cup of water each from some Frenchman. There appeared to be every nationality under the sun here though each had a compound.

Next, we had to suffer the indignity of having our hair sheared off, a fellow came out with a strange contraption which proved to be a hair shaver. One fellow turned a handle while another chap started shearing off our lovely locks. This was the closest thing to being bald



Photograph from 'Wikipedia Commons'

headed I have ever seen. We had a good laugh at each others transformation and when my turn came I took a peak in a window at my reflection and I wasn't so happy. Still, we were all alive. Who was to see us except our companions. Afterwards, we stripped and everything we possessed was placed in big debussing covers. The best part was to come for after this we moved into a big shower room and took a really hot shower bath. It certainly was enjoyable. We then moved along to drying rooms with big electric fans and soon dried off. Passing through another door we was suddenly caught unawares and found we had been disinfected. The next thing was inoculation and vaccination and from here we went outside to collect our clothes etc. both Italian and Russian POWs were also going through the same processes and one could not help noticing the poor physical condition of a lot of them. Our photographs and other details were taken at another place and here we received our POW number. It was getting dark when we arrived at the British Compound and we all felt hungry. On enquiring from the German Sentry we learned no rations were forthcoming at this time of day. We waited around for about an hour and by this time it was dark and we were cold and 'browned off.' We were eventually

shown into one of the barrack rooms the first impression one got was bad. There must have been well over two hundred men in one half of this barrack room, three tier bunks were crammed together down one side of the room while in the centre was draught pipes and two fires with hot plates on each for cooking and boiling purposes. Down the other side we found long tables and forms.

A hut commander was in charge of each room and he certainly had a full time job. At one end of these rooms was a primitive latrine for night use only and at the other end we found a sink and cold water tap for washing up purposes while another brick place housed the ablutions; no baths or showers were provided. We were given 'billy' cans each and palates stuffed with paper waste also a couple of blankets each and told as no beds were spare we must bunk down on the brick floor. We were unable to get our beds down until the rest of the chaps cleared off to bed and altogether it was a terribly congested state of affairs. We lived under these conditions for over a week and in that time we each received a half share in a Canadian Parcel. By the way, I had shared my British parcel with two other fellows. We managed to eke out a fairly balanced diet with a little planning and the German sugar, margarine, bread, potatoes and tinned meat supplemented our Red Cross foods. Quite a deal of time was spent in preparing and cooking the meals.

The way the Hut functioned was as follows:

The Hut Commander was in control - he supervised rations, water. Special issues; in fact everything in general that concerned the welfare of the fellows in his hut.

Then there was Group Leaders who controlled the food and special issues of a group consisting of about thirty-five men.

Lastly we had Section Leaders who had the job of sharing out the rations of about five or six men under their section.

Also there was 'Hut Fatigues' which consisted of 'chow carriers' whose job was to collect the soups and potatoes at dinner time. Dry rations which consisted of either bread, margarine, sugar, cheese, raw and tinned meats were collected by other chaps.

Two hot water issues a day were made and fellows were detailed to collect these. Another duty was known as 'Duty Hut Fatigue' and on

this practically everyone could be called on to do some duty such as 'wood gathering,' 'paper gathering' etc. etc..

Well, after about one weeks stay at Hut 36⁵ as it was numbered, we moved into another vacant Hut and was we pleased. This meant we got a bed each and I took the opportunity to bunk near my crew, Joe and Jimmy. We also pulled up with a paratrooper called Tom Beraick and Jimmy's friend Sam Keok.

The five of us decided to pool our parcels.

