

# Gen's Story

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## **Chapter One**

When Germany marched into Poland I was on leave in my home town of Tarnopol which was about 25 kilometres from the Russian border. (It is now Russian territory).

One morning on my way in to town I noticed a large placard which read "MOBILISATION". All service men must report to their own units immediately. I turned back home straight away to tell mother that Germany had invaded Poland and we were at war with them and I must return to my unit at Lwow 140 kilometres away.

I packed my gear into a small briefcase. Also I managed to squeeze in a paper bag holding a few sandwiches that my mother had prepared. When I turned to her I noticed that she was very worried and nervous, the tears started rolling down her face. She was obviously wondering if she would ever see her son again. It was in fact twenty five years before she did. "Goodbye and look after yourself my son" she said. We hugged and kissed.

At this moment, my father called my name "Genek!". I went to him and he passed a small picture in to my hand, "pray and he will look after you." It was a picture of a Saint in Stomistow Kostko which I put in my pocket and from then on carried at all times...I still have it to this day. He kissed my forehead patted my back and said "Goodbye my boy".

For us it was a goodbye as he died of a heart attack after the war before I was able to return with my family for a visit to Poland.

It was about a ten minute walk to the station on my way I called at the Post Office to withdraw my savings. I knew that if I didn't get them then there would be little chance of finding a Post Office during the war. I was lucky the Post Office was open and I got my money.

Arriving at the station I noticed it was very crowded for an ordinary day. A few friends mine were there all on their way back to their units. I was a quarter of an hour before the train arrived. The train was a special one; "Luks Torpedo". It had just one coach with a sitting capacity of 110. It travelled at 150 kilometres per hour and stopped at one station only between Tarnopol and Lwow. The usual train travelled slowly and stopped at every station so I was lucky.

Boarding the train I found myself a window seat on the left side of the carriage in the hope of getting a last glimpse of my home, which was only a few yards from the railway where all the trains passed. I was expecting my mum and dad to be waiting at the gate in the distance. As the train passed my mum was crying and waving farewell with her handkerchief.

I felt a little sad and upset. After passing my home I lit a cigarette which helped me to relax more. During the journey, sitting near the window I watched the countryside passing by.

On arrival at Lwow the train did not stop at the station as usual because the station was already being bombed by German bombers. The station was completely in ruins and all passengers including myself got out of the train about two kilometres from the station. I looked around and could hardly recognise the place.

During peace time, from the station to the airfield I would usually take a bus or a taxi, but this time there was no transport at all. I was wondering how to get to my station which was situated outside the little village Sknilow. I decided to walk to the camp.

During the long walk I noticed German bombers had done a lot of damage. Some buildings and cottages had been burned and destroyed completely. On the way I saw only a few people, they were wandering about their homes.

When I arrived at camp the gates were wide open. Nobody was on duty, it was very quiet. I stepped inside and walked through dust, bricks soil and grass. They were mixed up and scattered all over the place, big and small crates were everywhere. All the buildings and married quarters had been burned and damaged. Inside the buildings, beds, mattresses and lockers were all over the place.

My room and my bed where I slept were completely destroyed and covered with bricks and dust. Walking outside in the direction of the sergeant's mess, I noticed deep trenches had been dug between the buildings. When I entered the ruined sergeant's mess I found a blackboard with a notice giving the directions to the temporary Registry office. To find this place and office took me quite a while. The office was in a barn in the village.

The barn had been lucky, it had not been burned. One man was sitting on the bench, in front of him was a small table with a few pieces of paper on the top. I told him I had been on leave and wanted to join my squadron. After a few minutes searching for my name he told me I had been transferred to a unit for training new pilots. He was a very nice fellow and during the conversation he told me he was very lonely. Being in the barn all the time he never saw anybody, only the farmer's son who brought him something to eat and drink. During the conversation he told me what a terrible time he had during the bombing of Lwow and the aerodrome. The German bombers had destroyed a large vodka distillery in the city. Vodka is now a very popular drink in England and all over the world. Finally, he gave me directions to find my colleagues.

It was not so easy finding the place. It was in the countryside about 10 kilometres from the station. It was a hiding place for us and for planes in a small forest. The airplanes were covered with nets and small branches from the trees to protect them from the Germans who were flying all over the country. We did not have a chance to start training. We could only move about by jumping from one bush to another like rabbits.

In the day time we were just lying under the branches of trees and watching the German bombers and fighters flying overhead. At the same time, we heard an explosion from the distance and saw flashes during the night. During this time we never had proper food. We did not have any supplies from headquarters and we were completely isolated from everyone. We had a little from the nearest village which we bought with our money. The farmers were very good to us sometimes they gave us food for nothing or charged very little.

One early morning after a night's sleep we were lying under the trees when we heard the sound of small pieces of wood crackling and a rustle of something under the grass, thinking someone was coming in our direction. We looked and spotted a soldier walking with a bicycle and shouting "Hoy! Hoy! Where are you?"

We got out from under our bushes and gave him the same shout: "Hoy! Hoy! We are here." It was very nice to see a fresh face. We asked him how he found us. He said that it was a long story to explain. He had been riding his bicycle from village to village asking everyone if they had seen any small airplanes flying around. Anyway, we asked him what the problem was and why he had come there.

He told us we had to leave this place as soon as possible because Russian tanks had crossed the Polish border. They were terrorising people, shooting, taking prisoners and transporting them to Russia.

We did not waste any time we packed our gear, tested the airplanes, filled them up with petrol to be ready early next morning to fly in the direction of the Rumanian border which was about 170 degrees south. From where we were it was over 300 kilometres. We had an exciting evening and kept our fingers crossed and hoping that everything would be ok the next day.

During the night we were talking and planning our flight. We did not get a lot of sleep that night, about two hours. In the morning when we got up the weather was favourable, the sun was shining, no clouds in the sky and the wind was very light. The weather was on our side.

Flying in a light airplane needs more skill and attention, taking off and landing on the rough and bumpy land. We were flying and landing in different places quite often, not knowing what kind of landing would be next.

The time had come and we were ready to take off, following one another according to our plan.

The night before, we had decided to not to fly in formation to avoid being seen by German fighters. All of us knew where we were flying, which course, which height we should have. I was lucky the course was in the direction of my home, Tarnopol, and I hoped to see my home and mother once more.

The flight was very exciting and we were flying very low skimming the tops of trees. When I got nearer to my town, I was more afraid about Russian fighter planes than German because my town was only 25 kilometres from the Russian border. It is the most direct route for flying to Rumania.

On the way I saw my river Seret. It looked like a long shiny snake, sliding between grasses and trees, taking the same direction in which I was flying. From north to south, I was flying parallel to my river. Passing fields, trees, villages and animals grazing on the green pastures. As I flew near the town in the distance I saw over the horizon, towers of churches and roofs of the highest buildings. All I saw reminded me of the happy days of my life.

I remembered during school holidays and weekends being with my friends on the River Seret we had a lot of fun, fishing, swimming, jumping from the bridge into the water and sun bathing. Sometimes we took a lot of food, gherkins, sausages, bread, beer and more and we made our own picnic.

Towers of the church reminded me of when I was a student, every Sunday we marched in pairs to the church for the Sunday service. The church was filled with students, from different

schools and colleges. After an hour and a half, when the church service was ended we came out of the church and went our own way.

When I flew over the town I decided to see my home, finding it was very easy because it was next to the railway line. I flew low over the house and circled it twice but I did not see anybody on the ground and I wondered where my mother had gone. Now my mind was concentrating only on the direction of Rumania about 100 kilometres to the border. During the flight I saw columns of people marching towards Rumania.

When I flew nearer and nearer to the border I noticed shining in the distance like a mirror the River Dniester which separates Poland from Rumania as a natural border. Over the river I saw a big bridge and hundreds of people crossing over to the other side. It was another 25 kilometres from the border to the town at Cherniowice where we should land.

## **Chapter Two**

When we were over the town we circled around to find the aerodrome. After a few minutes we spotted the place where we should land. On the ground we saw hundreds of airplanes small ones big ones, all different types placed all over the field. In the middle of the field there was one man controlling all the traffic. The landing field was quite good, about one and a half kilometre wide.

When my airplane touched the ground I was directed to taxi to the side of the field. I stopped and when I got off the plane I felt relieved and at the same time very tired and exhausted. Walking in the direction of the hangers I met a few friends from my squadron. It was an exciting time, telling stories about what had happened and how the Germans had demolished us on the ground, in the air and on the sea. We had already lost 1 million men in the fighting.

The time had come to have a wash and get something to eat. When I asked my friends where I could buy some food, my mate told me that they were not selling anything to eat or drink, they told us we could go into town to get something.

The place was like a market, thousands of people walking around and wondering what to do and where to go, some were lying in the shade of trees and some were lying under the wings of airplanes. What they offered us for the night was a large empty hanger, no beds, no tables, chairs or benches only hard cold concrete.

Later on I went with my friend to the town to buy some food and drink. Fortunately I had some Polish money with me and they accepted this very easily. We bought two loaves of bread, sausages, grapes and two bottles of soda water. After shopping we returned to the airfield where we shared our food and drinks. Under the shade of the trees we found an empty space on the grass, where we sat down with relief and enjoyed Rumanian sausages, fresh bread and soda water.

The drink of water went very quickly. The weather was very nice and very hot. After a rest and a little sleep, we went to find out what our next step would be. On the way to the office we met some officials they told us we would be moving the next day to Bucharest the capital of Rumania.

During the conversation they told us that they were expecting another thousand people and refugees the next day and they must have some space for them. That was the end of our conversation.

Night and darkness came very quickly, tired and weary people started coming to the hanger for a night's rest. They were looking for the best and the quietest place, far away from the doors. We came in as well, like bees to the hive but without any honey. Each of us had a couple of blankets, they were very useful.

I lay on the hard concrete floor covered with a blanket and thinking and talking with my friend and making plans for the next morning. When we stopped talking we fell straight to sleep.

The next day when I got up I felt stiff and ached all over my body. When I came out of the hanger it was a beautiful sunny day. I went with my friends to have a wash at the water tap which was outside the hanger. We had a good splash with the cold fresh water and this woke me up and I felt much better. For our breakfast we had the rest of the sausages and bread and soda water. Our next problem was to get some petrol for our airplanes for the rest of the flight to Bucharest, about 500 kilometres.

I was lucky I did not have to wait long in the queue for petrol. When I had a full tank of petrol I taxied my plane to the side of the aerodrome and left it there and waited for my friend he was still in the queue. For the flight to Bucharest we needed a Rumanian map we had only Polish maps. We walked in the direction of the main building; we would find any office where we could get some information. We could not get any from the people working on the aerodrome as they did not understand us and we did not understand their language.

When we went inside the hall of the building there was a big poster on the wall with a little map on the side. This was what we were looking for, a little map with the town of Bucharest on it. I made a drawing of the map in a little notebook I had with me and this gave us directions to Bucharest. Happy because we had this little map with us we returned to our airplanes.

We needed two men to start the engine one in the cockpit and the other on the ground to whirl the propeller round. As the propellers were turning the engine was receiving petrol in the cylinders. When all was ready with the pilot in the cockpit the engine was switched on and after one more swift turn of the prop, the engine started immediately. We repeated the same procedure for my friend's airplane. I left my cockpit and kept the engine on a very low solution with the brakes on. My friend sat in his cockpit and I turned his propeller.

When all was ready and the engine started I quickly climbed into the aircraft and we both got ready to taxi on to the starting point. Slowly we taxied to the end of the aerodrome facing against the wind. A Rumanian pilot was on duty and was standing in the middle of the aerodrome with a flag in his hand. We were waiting for his signal to take off. The place was very busy everywhere we could see airplanes of all different types, military and private.

After a short time we saw a waving flag signalling us to take off. The two of us took off in formation, slowly we gave acceleration and our airplanes started to move slowly. We gave more throttle and increased speed to 110 kilometres per hour. We left the ground and climbed up and up to 3000 metres.

Our course was set for Bucharest, We had a lovely flight the weather was beautiful and we had nice country side beneath us. For fun, we flew very low, diving on grazing sheep, they were clustered together like a big white ball.

We kept on course ok. The distance from Cherniowce to Bucharest was about 440km and we would be in the air for 3 hours. The little map I had drawn was very handy for me. It gave me some main points of direction. Time passed quickly suddenly on the horizon I saw the capital of Rumania, Bucharest. It was a big city.

Finding the aerodrome was easy. We circled the city once and there at last was our destination where I wanted to land. The Rumanian personnel on the aerodrome had been informed already that a lot of Polish pilots would be landing. They had prepared a special strip of land for us to land. I landed and a few minutes later my friend landed as well. Each aerodrome was directed by duty soldier to where we were going to leave planes.

The place was crowded with all different types of airplanes. When I got out of my airplane, I knew I would never be able to see her or fly her again. It was very sad for me as it was like losing a best friend. It had given me so much pleasure and had saved my life. Without her I would be a dead duck in a concentration camp in Russia. Leaving her I gave her a kiss and touched her wing to say goodbye.

Walking with my friend in the direction of the main building we met more friends from the same squadron and also some from different units. We now were refugees on foreign soil. We started our new lives in Rumania. Our main aim was to get to France.

The Rumanian authorities gave us accommodation in empty hangers where I experienced sleeping on bare concrete floor once more, as in Cherniowce. The next morning we had a meeting at the end of the aerodrome in a shady quiet place. Over two hundred personnel of different ranks from airman to squadron leaders attended. We asked a lot of questions and we had a lot of answers.

We chose a man to be our leader and two more to help him in his job. The most important thing was to inform the Polish consul in the town how many of us there were and that we needed help. We had meetings twice a day one in the morning about 11am and the second in the evening at 5pm.

Next morning our leader went into the town to find the Polish Consul.

At our evening meeting we received good news. The Polish consul had given us money; 100 for the time being. They told us to have photographs taken for passports which we would need for travelling to France.

The next morning we all met in the place where the photographs were to be taken for our passports. One of the men brought an ordinary camera and a blanket to use as a background. Two men held the corners of the blanket behind the person whose photo was being taken. Every picture was carefully numbered and name was written on it, they were then delivered to the Polish Consul where they were taken care of. We could only sit and wait and hope that we would receive our passports very soon.

Next day we had another meeting as usual in the same place and we waited for the daily briefing. This time we had a surprise, they told us we would be moving to a different place, away from Bucharest and we must be ready near the main gate the next morning, they would then take us by lorry to an unknown destination. This news kept us on our feet with more excitement and talking.

The next morning the time came and we were ready and waiting for the transport. We would be travelling in an army vehicle which was covered with canvas, like gypsy wagons. Once inside no body could see us and we could not see where we were going. The lorry arrived and



we scrambled in and settled on the wooden benches. These vehicles had been especially built to transport soldiers.

Half an hour later the officials came, they checked and rechecked everyone on the list to make sure nobody was missing. That morning the weather was very nice and it was hot sitting and waiting under canvas and we were sweating as if we had a Turkish bath.

The time came and the drivers got the orders that they could drive away. The first few kilometres of the journey was not so bad until we got out of Bucharest. When we got on to the country roads it was like sitting over square wheels, we were shaken from side to side, up and down and our heads nearly popped out through the roof. Romanian second class roads were very bad and very muddy. In the middle of the roads there were big holes that looked like craters on the moon and were filled with mud and water. After hours and hours of travelling we came to our destination.

The journey took so long because the drivers would not drive faster because of the condition of the roads.

Anyway, we arrived in a small village. When we got out we felt very tired thirsty and we had cramp in our legs. I needed to have a good stretch and a good wash. The farmers in the village had been waiting for us. Each farmer took four of us to his cottage where we were to be for some time.

The accommodation was not bad and we were pleased to have a roof over our heads. The cottage where we stayed was very small and was made of wooden boards. We opened the squeaky door and inside we had a wooden bed, no table and no chairs and one small window. We had decided to make this place as comfortable as possible for us.

One bed was shared between four men. It was so small that there was not even enough room to straighten our legs. So we asked the farmer to bring us a couple of bundles of straw which we spread on the floor and covered this with blankets to protect our bodies from the prickly straw. When we finished our bedding and were satisfied that everything was ok, we went next door to see how our friends cottage looked and what kind of furniture they had.

We had no surprise! They had near enough the same furniture as we had in our cottage. We had some laughs and plenty of jokes about our accommodation. When the jokes were over one of our friends suggested that we should go in to the town for a look around and to get something to eat and drink.

From our farmers we got good information about how far it was to the nearest town and where we could get some food and drink. The distance from the village to the town was approximately 3 kilometres. We decided to go to the town and made up our mind to go at 10.30am which was in ten minutes time.

It was pleasant walking through the countryside together. The weather was very nice and we could see nice views all around us. On one side of the road was a plantation of grapes which stretched miles away in to the distance. On the other side the corn covered the land and it looked like waves moving on the open sea.

When we got to the town the first thing on our mind was to find a pub where we could get something to eat and drink. Walking along and looking around we noticed men outside some shops and they were grilling sausages, long strips of meat cutlets and onions it looked very appetising, so we decided to have some of it.

Before we ordered we had a good look and saw how the sausages were sizzling on the thick base with red hot charcoals under. Our appetite was more roused and we knew we definitely wanted some of this stuff. I ordered two pieces of meat two slices of bread and onions as well. He made a sandwich for me. The sandwich was very tasty. Walking and eating our first good meal we spotted a pub on the corner of the road, outside there were a couple of men sitting on a bench near a wall and drinking beer.

We went inside the bar and looked round. There were not many people there. We guessed that was because it was morning and most people would be at work. We ordered four glasses of beer. An old man was serving behind the bar and he had a big surprise to see foreigners in his little town. We did not have much of a conversation because of the language problems. We finished our drinks paid for the four beers and left the bar.

We spent nearly half the day in the town, walking and looking for a shop where I could buy a suit. I needed this for travelling to the countries as citizens and not in my forces uniform. Why must I travel in a citizen suit?

When we had our photographs taken in Bucharest we had an order from the Embassy that we must be taken in civilian suits, because on my passport I would be entered as being a professional farmer. When we finished our search we found a couple of clothing shops. On the way back to the village we bought some supplies for our supper and for breakfast the next day as well. Everyday we would be waiting for the messengers who were working between the embassy and our village. Sometimes he brought news about what was happening generally around the world and sometimes he brought passports for some lucky friends who were going on the next journey to France.

We went into the little town everyday for our meals. I hadn't got much money but had some Polish money which they accepted in the shops. I badly needed some more money for my suit which would cost 500 Polish zloty. I did not have enough. The only thing I could do was to sell my revolver which I had in Poland.

Selling the gun was very easy. A lot of men asked for souvenirs like guns, belts, badges, medals and other things which belonged to the forces. Walking down the street an old fellow approached me and asked if I had a gun for sale. I gave him a wink as a signal that I had a gun for sale, I told him I wanted 700 zloty he offered me 500 zloty and I accepted.

We went to the side of the street where it was quiet and there were not many people. He gave me the money, I gave him my gun and we walked away quickly. I was then ok I had money for my suit and a few hundred extra.

I was feeling very tired so decided to go back to my village. On the way I bought a small loaf of bread, half kilo of sausage and some grapes. When I went in to my hut I got some good

news from my friends. They told me that our messenger had brought our passports...it was very good news.

We had prepared ourselves for moving to the port of Baleik which lies on the Black Sea. At the same time as we got our documents, we got instructions on how we should get there in disguise so as not to be recognised. We had to travel in small groups of between four and five people and in our own time day or night.

Our hut was very lucky four of us got passports on the same day. We knew we had to be ready in two or three days not all of us had a civilian suit and other things. Some friends were ready. I decided to go to the town the next day to buy my suit and be ready to be moving in a day or two.

It was late, after twelve o'clock but before we went to bed my friends gave me there passports to look after because I was the only one who had a case with a lock. I collected the passports put them in my case locked it and put it under my bed.

Next day I went to town to buy a suit. When I got there I went straight to the shop looking for an ordinary jacket and trousers which is what I wanted. They cost 600 zloty which was too much for me. I left the shop and went to the other shop to compare prices.

When I went in to look around I could see nothing suitable for me. I left and went to the first shop. When I asked for the jacket and trousers, the shop keeper asked for 100 zloty more. He knew that I needed them desperately and that I would buy and give him what he asked. I wondered what to do and in the end I decided I must have the jacket and trousers. I paid an extra 100 zloty and asked the shopkeeper to wrap them up.

He got some paper from under the counter and made a very neat parcel which I took and walked out of the shop. I met my friend on the way to the other shop where I was going to buy a tie. He asked me if I had sold my gun. I told him that I had and he asked me if I could sell his as I had been lucky and quick in selling mine.

Without thinking about it I said that I would. He passed me his gun discreetly and I put it in my overcoat pocket hoping nobody had seen me. He left me and wished me good luck. I went straight to the shop to buy my tie. When I got in I was looking around and I noticed the shopkeeper coming from the other side of the counter. He asked me what I wanted and I told him I wished to buy a tie.

He brought in the box containing the ties. As I picked one up, I felt someone suddenly grabbing my arms very strongly from behind and lifting me up. I turned my head back and saw two army policemen they turned me to the exit and we went out from the shop. They held my arms very hard and walked me in the direction of the police station.

As I walked through the street I was thinking how I could escape from my two captors. After a few minutes walk we turned at the next corner to the right side street. About two hundred metres down on the right side of the street was the guardroom. We went through the small iron gate, in the front of us leading to the door were four steps we went up them and one of the guardsman opened the door and we went in.

I couldn't believe what I saw. There were so many Poles from the army who had been arrested, there were about twenty of them sitting near the walls. One guardsman opened the door on the right side of the room and we went in to the office. Behind the desk was sitting an officer in uniform. I was facing him and he looked a very hard man.

The two guardsmen told him why I had been arrested. I had to guess what they were talking about. The officer gave them orders to search me. They searched all my pockets and found the gun which my friend gave me to sell for him. They handed the gun to the officer and he took it from them. His face changed completely, from a hard man to a happy fellow. He tried to open the magazine where the bullets were. He tried and tried to open it and in the end he asked me to show him how to dismantle it. He handed me the gun and in two minutes I showed him.

After, he asked me my name and the name of my village and where I was accommodated. When he finished asking me all the questions he gave a signal to the guardsmen to take me away. They took me to the next room where there were already Poles in chairs around the walls. They showed me a chair near the door, where I could sit. I put my parcel on the chair behind me and started to think how I could get away from the room. I was sitting in the chair when suddenly I remembered that when we came to the village we received very firm orders from the governor of the town: "All Poles from the army, air force and other units living near the town and having guns, ammunition, bayonets and other dangerous weapons should hand them to the police in the town." They had issued these rules because a lot of Poles were wandering around the town drunk and looking for trouble. They were singing and shouting and even shooting into the air.

I did not know if it was true or a rumour spread around, but we heard that one Romanian had been shot by a Polish soldier. Anyone not obeying orders and getting caught were to be sent to prison in Bucharest.

My eyes were looking around for a way to escape? The only way was through the door between the two soldiers standing with rifles and keeping an eye on us. It seemed very strange to me and I asked myself why the other boys were sitting so still and quiet. They looked very unhappy and very worried.

To find out why, I quietly said "Hello friends, cheer up." No sound came from anyone. Only the guardsmen shouted at me to stop talking. I kept quiet, but my mind was working on how I could get out of here. I was thinking about my friends left in the village. I had their passports in my case and we were supposed to be leaving in a couple of days.

I knew they would be worried about what had happened to me. My mind told me that I must get out of there, no prison for me in Bucharest!! I was guessing what kind of prison it was in Rumania and what kind of treatment I would get there. My mind was only on getting out as quickly as possible.

Suddenly I thought of a way to trick the guardsmen. I had tobacco, cigarette papers and matches. I took them from my pocket and started making a cigarette, rolling the tobacco in the paper, licking it and looking discreetly at the two guardsmen, it didn't look at all suspicious. Before I took the matches from my pocket I had been wondering what I could do

with my parcel on the chair behind me? I decided to leave it there because escaping with a parcel would be very difficult. Now for my Houdini escape!

I put the cigarette to my mouth and took the matches from my pocket. My movements were slow, I lit the cigarette and I kept the match burning in my fingers and pretending that I was wondering what to do with a half burning match. Like a gentleman I could not throw a half burnt match on the floor, so had to throw the match out of the door.

The two guardsmen were looking at what I was doing. I slowly stretched my hand with the half match in it and walked slowly in the direction of the door. The two guardsmen stepped away from the door. I opened it and threw myself out over the four steps down, opened the small iron gate, quickly ran out and slammed it after me...I was free and on the street!

I turned to the left because to the right far down was the main street leading in to the town where I had been arrested in the shop. As I was running down the street I could hear voices shouting, "Stop! Stop! Stop!" behind me. At the same time there were a few gun shots. I looked back and saw about six guardsmen shouting and running after me. I started running faster. I knew I was going in the direction of the village.

The road was muddy, heavy rain had fallen the previous night, this made progress hard. I did not see anybody except my pursuers who still shouting to me to stop. Suddenly I saw a man about 100 metres away in the middle of the road and I could see that he wanted to stop me. I knew that I could not turn back, for behind me were the soldiers. I was getting nearer and nearer to the man. When I got a couple of metres away from him, I stopped suddenly so that he fell into an empty space as he came for me. I made zigzag movements to the left and got away.

A few minutes later I turned to the right in to a small and very muddy road with no pavement. My feet were getting deeper and deeper in the mud and I was getting more and more tired and was sweating, as I was still wearing my overcoat.

I felt I was running too slowly so I decided to take off my overcoat whilst I was running. It was a big struggle, in the end I managed to get it off. I was holding it in one hand and wondering what to do? Drop it in the mud or not? I could not hold on to it any longer as it was getting heavier and heavier. I ran near some fences and gardens and hung my overcoat over a fence.

My hands were now free and I felt lighter, I jumped over the fence into one of the gardens and from one garden over the fence into another garden thinking it must be in the right direction for the village. I felt very tired jumping between the vegetables. I cannot remember how many gardens I ran through. In the end I got to a plantation. I went under the wire and fell flat under a bush of grapes.

My heart was beating very fast. I lay down on the muddy ground deciding in which direction I should crawl. I knew the plantation was on one side of the village parallel to the main road to the town and I had to find out where the main road was. I was lying down and hoping nobody would find me there, when suddenly I heard voices in the distance. They were people travelling from the town to the village. From this sound I got the direction in which I should

crawl to the road. My uniform was wet and very dirty with the mud, slowly and carefully I started moving in the direction of the road which would take me to the village.

I looked at my watch it was about 4pm. Suddenly, I heard dogs barking and men shouting, this could mean trouble as the dogs could find me. I decided not to move but to wait until the dogs stopped barking. I knew the guardsmen would be on my trail because I had told the officer in the guard room that I was living in the village and they would obviously be searching there. My aim was only on getting as near as possible to the edge of the plantation and to be close to the main road.

Lying down on the wet ground, I was tired and hungry and thinking and planning my next move, but I was too frightened to run from one section to another. The road was wide, about 25 metres. When I was lying on the edge of this section I looked to the left and right and far along the road I noticed a high tower where watchmen were standing. I did not want to risk running from one section to another in the daylight. So I decided to stop there until darkness, when it would be safer to cross the road.

During the time I was waiting for darkness I was thinking about all my friends waiting for me and preparing themselves for the next day when they would get away from the village. When darkness eventually came I made a positive move. I ran very quickly and dashed to the other side of the road. I went rapidly between the grape bushes and started ducking and crawling in the direction where the voices were coming.

I came to another section, looked to the right and left and all was clear so I ran again to the other side and went again between the bushes. I could hear the voices clearer and so was hoping that it would be last section of the plantation. I was getting more tired and hungry, I'd had nothing to eat since early morning. My clothing was very wet and muddy and I was cold. I had been there nearly 5 hours, it was completely dark and I was still there. I started moving faster to get quicker to the road where the voices were coming from.

Half an hour later I reached the edge of the plantation. I just had to get from there. So I squeezed my body between the wire fence and walked in darkness for about 100 metres and arrived on the bank of the road. I was lying under a prickly bush waiting for my friends and expecting that at any time somebody would be coming from the town. After a while, I heard our lads singing in the distance. Every minute the song was getting louder and louder. When they came nearer to me I got up and between my friends telling them what had happened to me in the town.

They had heard about the Polish man from the air force being arrested and escaping from the guardroom. I told them I needed help to pass the guardsmen, keeping guard on the corner of the main road which would take me to the cottage where I had been living.

This was the only way I could get there, past the guardsmen, as no other entry road existed. I told them I needed an overcoat because I was still wet and covered with mud and did not want to be recognised by the guards.

One of my friends gave me his overcoat it was big enough for me and covered my clothing. This made me feel happier. They told me to get in the middle between them and we marched

together singing very loudly and pretending that we were very drunk. The distance to the guard was approximately half a kilometre. When we got to the end of the plantation the guardsman was already waiting for us. He asked us for identity cards but we ignored him at first, then one of the lads showed him his identity few of the others and myself took this opportunity to walk past him and we went away. The others joined us a few minutes later. He was by himself and was out numbered. It was very dark and he only had his torch and he didn't want to struggle with drunken men.

When I got to the cottage, my friends shouted "Hooray, he is back!" I told them about my adventures and how I had tricked the Romanian guards and half a burning match made me free from being in prison in Bucharest.

They saw what a dirty soaked state I was in and they were able to imagine what trouble I had been in. I stripped off my clothing, talking and joking and laughing at the same time. I went outside and had a good wash under the water pump. I had spare underwear and a clean shirt to put on and a friend gave me his spare pair of trousers and a jacket. I felt much better clean and dry. It was getting quite late and I was feeling very tired and weary. I decided to go to bed and have a rest after staggering around all day until darkness.

I lay there thinking of my lucky escape.

The next morning we heard somebody knocking on the door. When it was opened it was one of our friends from the other side of the road. He told us that the Romanian gendarmes were searching the houses and looking for the air man who escaped from the police station. I got up quickly dressed myself and went out to find out where they were.

They had been searching from house to house, when I saw they were leaving one house and were walking into the other house, I jumped over the fence into my neighbours garden and took the short cut to my friends house, that had already been searched.

I asked my friend what kind of search they had carried out. They only looked around the rooms asked their names and how many people were living there then walked out. They had been quite polite just looked but did not bother to do much searching. When they went in to my cottage they came out in a few minutes, so I knew that everything was ok.

Once the gendarme had finished searching and had gone away. I returned to my hut and decided with my friends how and when we were going to leave the village. We really wanted to get out as quickly as possible and to be there in the little port of Balcik on the Black Sea, where the boat was waiting for Polish airmen to take us on the next leg of our journey.

From then on we were civilians not airmen and we had to disguise ourselves properly, we changed out of our uniforms into civilian clothes and we decided to leave the village behind us that night. We had all day to prepare ourselves for the long walk. We left behind for our friends anything that would be recognisable as air force property.

I also left behind my personal things as well as my sword which was about 14 inches long and looked like a stiletto. I received this 'kordirk' when I finished flying school. All pilots carried them while doing any duty on the ground, on parades and for self defence.

Preparations for that night went very nicely, each one of us checked our travelling papers and put them in deep pockets. We had some bread and sausages from the previous day which we took with us. Bread, sausages grapes and water were our main daily food.

So there we were, waiting for darkness.

During the day we had been listening for trains from Bucharest to Balcik. We wanted to know how many kilometres we must walk to the railway line, and the sound gave us some idea of the direction and distance. The time came and brought with it more excitement. Four of us set out in darkness walking through the meadows and fields to find the railway line. Walking through the wet ground our shoes, feet and trousers were wet up to our knees. It took us one and a half hours to reach the railway line. We were so pleased to have dry land under our feet.

Walking in the darkness on the railway line on damp sleepers like birds on the tree jumping from branch to branch was very hard and dangerous. It would have been very easy to trip over the sleepers a lot of times. We had been walking about one hour, when suddenly we noticed a spot of light in the distance. Our hearts started beating faster as we were hoping it would be a station. As we got closer we found out that it was indeed a station. There was now no lights just pitch darkness, so it was hard to find the main door of the building. Looking around we saw a light through the window shutters and we just hoped that somebody would be there. When we found the door we gave a good knock. After a few minutes we heard the sound of footsteps and the door was unlocked. A man opened the door and he asked us what we wanted. When he heard us speaking Polish he raised his arms and shouted greetings to us and told us to go in and rest...he was Polish too.

From the conversation we learned that he'd had the job for ten years. He offered us a welcome cup of tea. He lived with his wife and one young son and they were sleeping so he was unable to offer us any hot food. He told us that he was waiting for the last goods train to pass through. He said as well, that in a thousand years he would never have expected to see Polish airmen on his lonely station. He was the only person for all duties on the station. He was station master, ticket seller and did all the general work and cleaning.

We asked him how we could get to our destination of Balcik Port. He made a suggestion; he said that a goods train went through the station every half an hour very slowly because the track went up hill. We had a chance of getting on here and getting off at the next station, where we could catch a fast train to the port. We were very pleased to get a free ride.

It was time to say goodbye to our countryman, he wished us good luck and good journey. In the distance we heard the sound of the train coming and our friend gave us advice on how to get up on the steps easily. I had experience in Poland when I was in the forces when going home on leave. Sometimes the train slowed down near my home because signal lights had changed red and I jumped off. The sound got louder and louder, the train was puffing, it was a steam train.

We quickly decided who was going to jump first, second, third, and fourth. When the first man got on the step the wagon he gave a step to the next one and in no time at all the four of us were sitting on the steps of the goods wagon laughing and joking. We were travelling in the



open air and sitting on the step of the wagon. I could see the wheels spinning under round under my bottom, the chains were clinking between the wagons and there noise and draught all around us. It was much different than sitting inside the carriage on a soft bench and reading a newspaper.

It was very early morning as we approached the station when we were to get off. The train stopped at the side of the station. We got off crossed over a few lines and made our way to the passenger station. When we went inside the main hall we saw hundreds of people already waiting for trains. The interior of the hall was very dark, the windows were small, the lighting was poor and it was full of smoke from cigarettes.

We had been waiting for the train for about half an hour when we felt and heard the train coming and the passengers started hurrying along the platform for the train. Before the train stopped completely some people started jumping on the steps of the train and holding the handle bars. The train stopped and the crowd started rushing to the doors, pushing each other, we were also pushed and shoved between people. In the end we managed to squeeze ourselves inside the carriage.

A few minutes later the train started moving slowly with difficulty. We moved a few metres from the door, it wasn't easy to move I could not even put my hand in my pocket to get my cigarettes. The train was soon going at full speed. I wondered how long it would be before the inspector came to see our tickets. We did not have any, if we could arrive at our destination before the conductor checked our tickets as it would save me about 50 leu. One hour passed with the train still speeding away and keeping our fingers crossed that the conductor would not come to check our tickets. We knew that in Rumania it was very easy to bribe especially on trains.

After a time we heard the conductor shouting "Tickets please!" I held my money ready in my hand. When he got through the crowds and approached me and asked for my ticket, I passed the money to his hand and with a smile he squeezed my hand and took the money and started shouting "Tickets please!" again as he pushed his way through the passengers.

We had been standing in the corridor for more than two hours. In about half an hour we would be in Balcik, our destination. During that half an hour we were talking and thinking of what kind of place it would be and what kind of ship we would be travelling in. The time passed and our train approached the stop in Balcik. It was midday, the weather was very nice and very hot, we were thirsty, hungry and very tired.

Suddenly we heard a screech of brakes and wheels, the carriage jerked and the train stopped. Passengers started getting out of the train and we followed the stream of people. We went through the gates nobody was there to collect our tickets. Four of us walked out of the station and found ourselves on the street in Balcik. Our stomachs were empty because we were hungry and we needed something to eat and drink. We walked in the direction of the sea where we expected to meet an official. On the way we looked for a shop where we could buy something to eat and drink.

In a short time we spotted a shop and we went in. As usual we did not have much money to spend for a good meal. We had to consider how long we would be there and how much we

would need to keep ourselves. Anyway we bought the usual loaf of bread, four tins of sardines, one tin per person, a bottle of soda water and a packet of cigarettes.

On to the sea we found a place by the side of the road where we could have our breakfast, dinner and supper. It was a nice place, plenty of trees where we could sit in the shade. We spent about half an hour eating and drinking, we then decided to have a rest, lie down and stretch our legs. It had not been very pleasant standing in the corridor of the train for a long time. We did not spend a long time lying under the shade of the trees and we decided to get to the port by midday. We wanted to find out where the boat was and who was in charge there because we hoped to get some financial help from him.

When we got nearer we found it was a nice little town lying on the top of some small hills, it made a lovely picture from the distance. On the way we met a few friends that had been there some time. During our conversation with them, we received some good news. They told us what was happening there and where we could see a man who was taking care of the new arrivals. When we met the man he told us where we would be accommodated for a few days until our boat arrived. Later when he was ready we went with him to the hotel where we would be staying.

He told us that all the Poles were living in hotels. We entered the hotel where the owner greeted and welcomed us. He showed me and my friend to the room where we would be staying and said something in the Romanian language, smiled and walked away with two of our friends to show them to another room. When he closed the door we shouted "Hip Hip Hooray" three times. For the first time since the war had started we were able to go to sleep in a proper bed.

The room had two single beds a dressing table, a mirror and two chairs. We had a lovely view from our windows, looking down we could see the blue sea which stretched as far as we could see on the horizon. Below there were some nice buildings, shops, and hotels. It looked clean and bright and was painted all white. On the beach we could see golden sand and on it a few people were sunbathing. It was time to have a hot bath, we had not had a hot bath since the war had started. We had only had cold water to wash in.

My mate lay on the bed and had a rest and relaxed. I went to the bathroom for a good wash and bath and at the same time relaxed in the water. I was there quite a long time and I could've stopped another hour but I was thinking of my friend waiting for me and knowing he would like a bath as well. I had washed my clothing in cold water under the pump. But this was a special occasion having a bath and washing my clothes in hot water. When I had finished I gave my friend a shout to tell him the bathroom was ready for him.

He got up from the bed and went like lightning. I hung my washing on the chair near the window where it would dry in no time at all because it was a very hot day. When my friend came out of the bathroom we made ourselves ready to see our other two friends to decide what to do next. When we met them one floor down we went to see the little town and beach together.

Walking down the street and looking around the shop we found a little restaurant where we could get something to eat. We went inside and had a sandwich each and a glass of beer. We

could not afford to have anything else. When we finished our food and drinks and paid the bill we went to the beach to find out where our jetty was, anyway there was not much to look at. We did not see any big jetty for passengers, only a narrow bridge about four foot wide and approximately one hundred and fifty foot long. After our discovery we returned to our hotel. We could not walk any longer as we'd had enough and were very tired.

My washing now was very dry so I put them in my small case. I told my friends I was going to bed to try my spring mattress. It was like being in heaven, nice and comfortable. My friend went to bed as well. We said goodnight and slept, hoping that our boat would arrive the next day.

After a good nights sleep we got up, dressed, washed and went down for breakfast. A Romanian breakfast is different to an English one, it is a small cup of black coffee, one square piece of chocolate and a small crusty roll. After breakfast we went straight to the beach to find if our boat was there.

But there was no boat!

We went to see a fellow who was in charge and who has organised our transport by sea to France. When we met him in his hotel he told us that the boat was already on its way. We had been there for three days when the boat arrived. To our surprise when we saw it, it was not a passenger ship but more like a fishing boat. Anyway we were very lucky to have some transport to get us out of Rumania. In a short time the news had spread between the Poles to say that the boat had arrived. Half an hour later it looked as if there had been an invasion on the beach.

Later in the afternoon we were told by an official to be ready at anytime for the boat. We returned right away to our hotel. I collected my small case checked my passport, put it in my pocket and went down to the beach, where the boat was waiting. On the way I bought six lemons I knew I would need them as the weather was very hot and I could use the lemons for refreshment.

When I got to the beach there was a queue of fellows waiting outside a small shed where two Romanians sat inside behind a table. One was asking some questions, what job I had and why I was going to France. I told him I knew the agriculture business and that I was a farmer and France needed a lot of farmers.

Checking the passport and asking the silly questions was only a pretence to be seen to be doing their job. They knew we were soldiers and that we were going to France to fight the Germans. The queue disappeared from the beach very quickly. They wanted to get rid of us.

From the little office, I walked along the narrow bridge to the side of the boat, then climbed up an ordinary wooden ladder to the deck. On the deck I saw there were already over one hundred men. On the deck was also a seaman who showed me where to go for my bed. To get to my bed I had to climb down through a hole onto a platform where I could stand. He showed me hundreds of holes looking like honey combs in the frames of a beehive.

He said "these are your beds pick which one you would like, and sleep well". He laughed and walked away. At this time I did not know what to do, follow him and get out on to the deck or choose my bed. I decided to select my bed and was wondering which hole would be best, for the bed I chose is where I would be sleeping for the next few days. I picked out my bed, close to the exit and on the row up from the platform where I was standing. I had chosen one next to the exit in case of fire.

When I tried to get in to my bed I had some difficulty getting in to the hole. I could only manage to do it on my elbows and on my knees. I found it was very difficult to turn from one side to the other, and there was only straw instead of a mattress. I soon had enough of being in there as it was very hot and I had started sweating, so I decided to get up and go up on deck.

I climbed up to the deck and my eyes could not believe how many men there were on the boat. Every little space was occupied and still a few men were coming on board. I saw some fellow swim from the beach to the boat and climb up by rope. Friends on the deck were giving them a hand. Before long the captain shouted through the open window of the cabin on the deck that the boat was now ready for the voyage.

### **Chapter Three**

I heard the propellers turning and I felt the boat moving and jerking as we left the bridge behind. The ship slowly increased speed and we were on the way to France. We were on the Black Sea and going at full speed. It was late afternoon and I had nothing to eat since breakfast. My stomach was grumbling and I believe that all the fellows were having the same problems as we all had empty stomachs. We didn't know how to let the captain know we were hungry and very thirsty.

We started singing and shouting that we wanted something to eat and drink. One fellow went to the captain's cabin and asked him when we were going to get some food and drink. He told us that at any time the seamen were going to bring some to the deck. Half an hour later two men brought a big bucket of soup and dished it out, one full spoon of soup and one piece of bread each. That was our meal for the day. The weather was very nice and very hot.

After the meal I went for a walk to see what my friends were doing and where they were. Walking from the front to the end of the boat was a hard walk as the deck was occupied by men lying down all over the place. I investigated and found out that the boat had five men crew, the captain, three seamen and one stoker. The boat had been built in Greece and had been used for carrying coal. They had converted it for passengers, especially for us. On top deck, was a small rescue boat about 10 – 12 feet long, which was filled with loaves of bread and covered with heavy canvas to protect the bread from the rain. They had just one container of water which they used for cooking only. We could not use it even for drinking.

We had a wash with sea water in the morning. We had a bucket attached to a rope which I threw into the sea and lifted back full of water. Having a wash with this water was not very pleasant because with sea water it does not give any lather and I could feel dirt rolling between my hands and face. Nevertheless, we were still glad for having water for washing. Sailing on the Black Sea from Balçik to the Bosphorous Canal was 170 miles.

On the first night I went to bed inside my cabin; "the Square Hole". It was very uncomfortable. It was very hot and short of air, I slept in my trousers and shirt because we did not have any bedcovers. The straw scratched my face and prickled through my shirt. I was glad when morning came and I could get up from my bed of torture and climb up on to the deck for fresh air and to have a scratch and stretch. It was early morning and the weather was very beautiful. The sea was dark blue and very calm and our boat was cruising very nicely. Suddenly I heard a voice calling breakfast and after a while the same seaman brought a bucket of black coffee and dished it out with a slice of bread. That was our breakfast and was all we would get until later that afternoon when we had another meal of a cup of soup and a slice of bread.

All day we were sitting or lying and sun bathing. Mostly we played games of poker or bridge and some men slept until the afternoon meal. The next day we would be approaching the Bosphorous Canal and we would be able to see Constantinople the capital of Turkey which is now called Istanbul by the Turks. In the early afternoon of the next day we reached the Bosphorous Canal and we sailed through reaching the other side in darkness. What a beautiful picture of Constantinople I saw, it looked as if all the buildings of the town were illuminated with pretty lights. On the other side of the Channel, was the town of Scutari. We reached the

sea of Marmare which is 125 miles long and we were approaching the Dardenelles Channel which connected the Sea of Marmare with the Grecian Archipelago Sea and at this point it separates Europe from Asia. We sailed on in the direction of the Mediterranean Sea avoiding hundreds of small islands.

Life in the boat did not change. Every morning we had a cup of coffee and a slice of bread; late afternoon a serving of soup and a slice of bread. They were our meals for each and every day. After the first restless night of sleeplessness, scratching and turning in the hole. I decided to stay on the deck and I found a space between friends where I would stay for the rest of the journey. Three days had passed and we had another 100 miles to sail before we entered the Mediterranean Sea. We were getting more weary, tired and dirty and it seemed to me that the weather was getting hotter and hotter. We would be glad to get to our destination.

Each day I was having one of the six lemons I bought in Romania before the journey for refreshment. During the journey I had not had a proper wash or bath and neither had any of the other passengers. We did not know when and how long we would have to wait before we had a hot bath. As usual we were spending our time lying on the deck looking up to the sky and listening to the noise of the propeller or playing games of cards.

We approached the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea and on the horizon we could see the island of Crete. The Mediterranean Sea was very calm and the weather was still very hot. We were all sweating and were desperate to cool ourselves. We could not find a cool place anywhere on the deck. Not even a spot of shade because the deck was completely open to the sun. Next day a lot of friends started complaining that they were getting lice on their bodies. When I examined my body I realised that I had got them as well, it was a shock for me. On the boat we had no medical service so we could not get any treatment and the Captain had nothing to get rid of them. We could not understand why they only had a first aid box with a few bandages.

I was wondering how to get rid of these little pests as they were such a nuisance. In the end I found my own cure. The lemons that I had been using for refreshment I could use for those nasty little things treatment: I took a lemon and made a little hole then squeezed the juice and rubbed it between the hairs on my private parts, that is where they were attacking. They also liked to be under the arms but I was lucky as I did not have any hairs there. I had a funny habit and when I was very young I would pull out my under arm hair. I was using the lemon treatment quite often during the day. We would have a good laugh with each other seeing how many each of us could kill during the day. But some fellows were desperate to get rid of them and did not know what to do.

Some even decided to go for a swim in the sea! They took a long rope from the deck and threw one end in to the sea and the other end they tied to the deck. By then we were sailing in the middle of the Mediterranean sea. One fellow lowered himself by rope in to the sea and holding the rope enjoyed swimming behind the boat. When he had enough he climbed up to the boat with the help from his friends.

After the first swimmer was ok and safe on the deck another fellow went down for a swim then a third, forth and fifth. Suddenly I heard the shout of panic "Man, man over board!" All of the men started coming up from the hole on one side of the boat not knowing what was

happening, some thought it was a German submarine. I went to see who was over board it was one of the men swimming far away from the boat. The captain who was in his cabin could see the panic on the deck and saw that the boat had started tilting on to the left side. He started shouting to the men to get away from the side to the other side. The boat was in a very dangerous position.

When we realised that the boat was going to sink every man on the deck went to the other side to stabilise the boat. When the boat returned to the normal position and slowed down the captain started looking for the man in the sea. The man was a very good swimmer. When he came close to the boat a seaman threw a life buoy to him to stop him drowning. Instead of putting it on his body he pushed it away and started swimming towards the boat where a rope ladder was already lowered on the side of the boat. He climbed on to the deck where we were all shouting laughing and cheering. When all was OK on deck the boat went on course at full speed.

Only another four hundred miles to go!

After two days at sea we passed the island of Cyprus on our right. Later the captain told us that finally our journey would be over in a few hours.

## **Chapter Four**

We arrived at the port of Beirut and our boat docked, helped by a crew who were all black men. I had a big surprise when I saw real black people for the first time. Anyway, when our men started coming off the boat and on to the quay side the black men stood on the side just watching us come up from the hold like rats coming from a sinking ship. They could not believe that such a small boat could hold so many men. Their eyes nearly popped out.

These black men were all soldiers and were wearing uniforms. They had the most extraordinary red top hats with tassels on the top, similar to the fez that the magician Tommy Cooper would wear. The soldiers showed us the way to the waiting lorries which took us to the army camps.

What excitement and a scare our ride gave us. From Beirut we set off for the army camp riding on the lorries we travelled very fast on the narrow twisted and hilly road. On the way we did not see any trees or vegetation only rocks, sand and dusty land.

When we arrived at the camp we went through a big iron gate guarded by the black soldiers. Inside the camp we saw big buildings, two storeys high with long balconies. The buildings were about one hundred metres long and painted white. They took us to the second floor of a building and showed us a room where we were to stop for the night. The room was completely empty absolutely nothing just bare floor. They told us we would have some mattresses and blankets from down below and outside the building. We brought the bedding in and I put mine on the floor near the wall.

I had on my mind all the time that when I arrived at the camp I would be able to have a good bath or shower. When I dumped my gear together with my mattress and blanket, I took a bar of soap and went out on to the balcony to find where there was a bath or wash room. Going along the balcony and searching every room I found in the middle of the building a washroom with a few showers and a dozen washbasins.

I used a shower bath. I had a good wash and at the same time I washed my shirt, pants and socks. I put all my things on the floor under my feet, squeezing out the dirt like wine makers do in Greece when they squeeze the grapes with their feet in tubs. However, I was using my hands as well. When I finished I went back to the room where I had left my bedding and my small case.

I wanted to find where I could hang my washing to dry. The weather was very nice and very hot. So the washing would dry very quickly. I found a few nails in the wall, where I hung my washing and then I went down to the canteen where food had already been prepared for us. I had some vegetables which looked like boiled cactus and half a bottle of red wine. This is all I remember about what I had to eat all the rest I have forgotten. When we got back to our room I made my bed ready for the night. We were not allowed to go out from the camp, so we just walked along the balconies and around the grounds inside the camp.

After a week on the crowded little boat my legs were feeling funny and wobbly as we had not been able to do any exercise. Time passed very quickly and it was getting dark I went back to my room where I would spend my first night on a mattress and where I would be able to stretch my legs and have a good nights sleep. There were about seventy men in the room.



What a night I had, I could not believe my eyes, the light went out and the talking and laughing stopped.

After about one and a half hours sleep I felt itchy all over my body. When we put the light on I saw cockroaches every where running for cover in the holes in the walls and floor. I had bed bugs on my body. They were nasty things with a mustard smell. Especially when they were squeezed, they were the worst things I have ever seen and smelt. After shaking and brushing the cockroaches and the bed bugs from the mattress and blanket I went back to my bed to try and finish my nights sleep, but could not sleep again. My body was itching and the smell kept me awake.

I went on to the balcony a couple of times for fresh air. I could not relax, lying and thinking about how many days we would be stopping here. In the morning when the sun rose I was on my feet. I was disappointed as I had promised myself that I would have a good night's sleep and a good stretch. I went to the wash house to have a good shower and shave. For breakfast we had coffee, one big square of chocolate and French bread once again.

After breakfast I went with my friends for a walk around the camp. The camp was quite empty we only saw a few black soldiers on duty. After our walk we went back to our room where we heard some good news from our mates. They told us we would be moving away from the camp next morning. I was delighted with the news especially thinking about the previous nights fight with cockroaches and bed bugs.

We were not told where we were going, they told us it was a secret. After the second night I was very tired but I could not sleep for thinking about and listening to the cockroaches and bed bugs invading my body. When I got up early next morning the weather was very beautiful and we waited for the next leg of our journey.

After breakfast the lorries arrived. It was a signal that we would be moving. Half an hour later we heard shouting by French soldiers "Everybody out". When we got down to the compound they asked us to stand in rows of five making it easier for them to count. They finished counting and the lorries came closer to us one by one. We were counted once more into groups of people who were going on each lorry. When everything was OK and they had finished counting, the man in charge of the convoy gave orders to move.

When the lorries started moving my heart started beating faster everybody was excited. On the way to the port of Beirut our boys started singing songs. The convoy was moving very fast on the narrow hilly roads. When we got to the port our ship was already waiting at the dock side. The ship looked huge from one end to the other about 250 metres. When we got on deck we could not see any cabin where we could go. When we asked a sailor on the ship where our cabins were they told us there were no cabins but we would be travelling on top of the ammunition crates.

They lifted a few wooden planks from the deck and made an opening to the inside of the ship and told us we would be travelling in there. One by one we climbed down on the top of the ammunition. When I came down and looked around I saw a thousand crates of ammunition. It looked immense. It was pretty dark as the only light we had was what came down through the hole made by the missing planks. Looking to the left and right it was completely pitch black.

Everybody started looking around for a suitable place. I was also looking around for a place where I could lie down quite comfortably for the journey to France.

About an hour later our ship started pulling away from the dockside. I heard the propellers start and I felt the jolting and the shaking. We left the port late in the afternoon. On the open sea our ship was joined with a warship (a Destroyer) for protection of the ship and us as well.

During the day time the Destroyer covered our ship by sailing behind zigzagging in a serpentine line about four hundred metres away. At night time she was the same distance away but in front of us still zigzagging. On the first couple of days the weather was very nice and the sea was calm. The only problem was we were sweating like rats sitting or lying on the hard wooden boxes that were full of ammunition. We did not have much ventilation except for a few openings in the deck. During the journey we spent most of our time on the top of the boxes under the deck. During the day we were allowed to go up on deck to get some fresh air, but only for a short time and only in small groups. The captain must have had a good reason why we could not spend longer on the deck.

After two days the weather completely changed and we found ourselves in the middle of a stormy sea. We could not stand or walk around the ship. I was lying down all the time. I was feeling sick and could not eat or drink. I felt that everything was spinning round me. I had never been on a ship on heavy seas before and I could only imagine that the waves were very big. When the front of the ship tipped down and at the same time the other end of the ship went up. The propeller shook the ship making a very loud noise of 'doo doo doo' as they came out of the water.

The storm lasted for two and a half days, we were glad when it was all over and we could get out on to the deck to breathe in fresh air and to see the blue sky. Our ship passed the islands of Malta, Sicily and Sardinia. It then went between the mainland of Italy and Corsica. Eventually we arrived at the port of Marseilles where our ship was to dock. I was very glad to get off the ship and leave the darkness and the ammunition boxes behind me.

We arrived early morning. On the quayside buses were waiting for us. They took us from the quayside to the railway station. After travelling for two hours by train we arrived at the large city of Lyons. From there we went by coaches to the airfield where we got temporary accommodation.

They took us to where there were no beds only plenty of mattresses and blankets lying on the floor. When we had put our luggage at the side of the room and settled in, I lay on the mattress, stretched my body and thought 'No hard boxes for me tonight and no more bruises on my body!'

About half an hour later a Frenchman came into our room and told us food was ready in the dining room. We came out of our room and made our way in a line in rows of two and he took us to the dining room. It was quite a long walk and I noticed that the station was nearly empty. There were very few people around. Only ground staff who were looking after the station's affairs.

When we got to the dining room we saw that it was very large and we guessed that it was for NCO's. We sat at tables which were already laid with a bottle of wine for every two men. The food was being served from a kitchen hatch and we went up one by one to get a full plate of food. My friend and I returned with our food to the table where we celebrated our good, bad and dangerous times. First we filled our cups up with wine and said "Nasdrowia" to us.

We drank wine and ate the food. It was good but we were puzzled about a vegetable, we did not know what it was and how to eat it. It looked like a small cactus, plenty of long green leaves but to me no taste. Friends at other tables told us how to eat this cactus. Break off a single leaf and suck or eat the end of it, but I couldn't taste anything so I left it.

Anyway we had a good laugh. For the first time on our journey I had a proper meal sitting at the table with friends, eating and drinking like human beings.

When we finished eating we went back to the room where we were to spend the night. After an hour, one of the French officers came in and asked for a list with our names on it, and he asked us to take the list to the main office. One of our higher ranked friends did as he asked.

Next morning after a nights sleep and rest we got up early because breakfast was served early from 7am to 8am. We knew where the kitchen was so we made our own way there in small groups. For breakfast we got a cup of coffee and one small square of chocolate and a piece of French bread. Again. When we had finished our breakfast we returned to our room where we had a big surprise, we saw a priest on the door step waiting for us.

He introduced himself to us and told us he was the priest of the camp and he had a small church in the camp. He invited us to a service and prayer. He told us he knew that the Polish were 90% catholic and he wanted us to pray together for our country, our fathers and mothers, all our relatives and the people of Poland. We did not want to disappoint him and so we went together to his church. When we came to his church I noticed the church was quite big and very nice inside. At the end of the service we sang a Polish hymn, it was a little emotional. The priest told us there was a service in the church every morning at 9am and he would be very pleased to see us.

When we got back to the room one of our friends told us that we were going to get some pocket money because we needed it for personal requirements, i.e. soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, cigarettes, barbers and other things. For me the money was very important as my shoes needed repairing very badly. Up until now I had been almost walking on bare feet.

The next day we went for breakfast and as usual afterwards we returned to our room where we decided who was going to church. Quite a few mates stopped behind but I went with the rest as I did not wish to disappoint the priest. When the service was over we returned to our room and decided what to do. Some men went for a walk around the camp some just lay on their beds and some played cards, some played poker or bridge. All the rest waited for dinner and for the money that we should be receiving that day. But nobody knew what time it would arrive.

We could not go out to the town as we had not yet got identity cards. We had been there for two days and they had promised us that we would get them very soon. Time passed very

quickly and after half an hour it was dinner time with more wine on the table. After dinner this time we took our share of wine back to the room instead of drinking it during dinner time. One of our friends managed to get a big bowl of sugar as well. All the wine we brought back we put into a bowl with the sugar and he put all the mixture on top of the stove. The stove was very big and stood in the middle of the room it was used for heating the room in hot weather. The wine and sugar mixture was heated slowly to dissolve the sugar and after it was brought to the boil for a few minutes. When the wine was cold in the evening we had a party.

On the third day we received the identity cards and we got some money as well. The same day I went out to find a shoe repair shop and I walked along the shops looking for one. I was lucky and found one very easily; it was not far from the camp. When I opened the door, the bell rang and I went in and walked to the counter. An oldish man was sitting near the window and doing some repairs... I said "Bonjour monsieur" he replied "Bonjour" and I looked into his eyes at the same time. I lifted my foot and showed him what condition my shoes were in – he laughed and shook his head. I explained to him as best as I could and he understood what I wanted from him.

He could see my shoes and that was enough for him. I took my shoes off and gave them to him and he showed me a chair where I could sit and wait. While he was doing the work I told him I came from Poland. He knew Poland was at war with Germany and he told me he listened to the radio a lot. When he had finished my shoes he called me "Monsieur" and I went to the counter and he passed me my shoes with lovely new leather soles. I put them on my feet, they felt very strange at first as they were stiff to walk in but I was very pleased. I had a pair of shoes like new and they would last me for a long time. I paid him for the repairs but he did not charge me a lot. I was wondering why? I think he was sorry for me. He shook my hand and I said "Thank you" to him a few times as I walked away. I opened the door and walked away from the shop.

When I came to the camp it was just in time to go for dinner and a half a bottle of wine. After dinner we had roll call outside our room on the pavement and waiting for the French officer who wanted to say a few words to us. When he came, he told us that we were all going to have a French lesson once a day after breakfast.

The next day we started as usual. After breakfast the French man was ready and waiting to take us to our lesson. When almost everyone had come from breakfast he ordered us to form rows of two and march together to the building where he had a special room for our lessons. We entered the room and found it was an ordinary classroom with desks chairs and blackboard. We took our places and the teacher went to the cupboard. He brought out stacks of notebooks and pencils and gave them to one of the fellows to give us each a notebook and pencil.

When we were all settled he introduced himself and said a few words to us. Everything he was explaining to us he was drawing and writing on the blackboard. We copied it from the blackboard and wrote the pronunciation at the side. Our first French lesson took more than one and a half hours. Before we left the classroom the teacher reminded us that the lesson would be in the same room and at the same time the following morning.

When we got back to our rooms there was nothing to do only play cards or sit outside the building and wait for dinner. The days passed as usual and after three days we had good news. They told us to pack up our gear because we were moving to a different camp. Next morning, they took us by coaches to the Air Force station, Laburze near Paris. We were accommodated there in old wine cellars about half a mile away from the camp. Nobody knew why we did not stay inside the camp in proper buildings but they must have their reasons.

When I entered the wine cellar it looked like the inside of a prehistoric cave. The caves were very long and looked like the London underground railway. There were not many lights on the ceilings so it was half light and half dark. Beds were lined up against the walls and it was very depressing. Anyway we knew we were only stopping for a few days. Everyone put their luggage or something on a bed to indicate it was occupied. After an hour we were settled and the noise and shouting had stopped. A Frenchman who was in charge of us came in and told us to be ready in half an hour, because we were going for dinner in the camp's main building.

When we got to the camp there was a huge dining room. It was a typical forces dining room. Dinner was already waiting for us. We were served from a hatch. Food was as usual French with the vegetable looking like a cactus and a half bottle of wine.

After dinner we returned to the wine cellar and decided what to do next. Four of us agreed to see the city of Paris, Eifel Tower, the Metro and the Arc de Triomphe. We noticed that there was quite a lot of red lamps. After a couple of hours exploring we went for a drink. We found a quiet little pub with just a few Frenchmen sitting by the table in the corner and drinking a beer. We took our seats by the table and one of our mates went to order four glasses of beer. We had two glasses of beer each. After we had finished our drinks, we paid and went out.

Walking along the street we looked in the shop windows where we saw a lot of nice things on display. We left the city and went by bus to our accommodation. When we arrived our colleagues told us what had happened during our absence.

They told us that we had been divided in to small groups with about twenty men in each. Every group had a small bucket that looked like a flask for the morning coffee. One man from each group was to bring the breakfast, coffee, a piece of chocolate and a piece of French bread. The main meals were still to be served in the main camp. Our group decided to have two men on duty in the morning to bring breakfast for the boys. We wanted to know who would be first on duty next morning to bring the breakfast.

We did not have any volunteers for the job, so we drew numbers from a hat and it was the ones who picked one and twenty would be our waiters first. I was lucky as I did not pick number one or twenty. When the day was over and we went to our beds, our lads started joking and laughing about having breakfast in bed. Some fellows were shouting that our shoes needed cleaning and polishing and we wanted white coffee not black coffee as if we were in a five star hotel.

By the way, I was lucky because I did not draw the waiter's job because we were only in the camp for four days. During these four days the Frenchmen who were in charge of us told us we were to be transferred to England at any time. After four days living in the wine cellar, we had a visitor on the fifth day. A representative from England arrived by plane to see us and

they wanted all flying personnel going to England to join the Royal Air Force. They completed their business very quickly and took all our names, ranks and professions. They told us to pack our cases and be ready in two hours time for the flight to England.

We were very happy to be going to England and to be joining the Royal Air Force.

After two hours we went to the dining room with our belongings and waited for the officials. About a half hour passed, two gentlemen from England and a Frenchman came in and told us that they were going to call our names out to be sure their list was OK. After checking and counting was under control, they told us we were going to the aerodrome where the planes were waiting for us.

The crew opened the door and one by one we went in to the plane. I went in side and I could see it was a huge plane; there were no passenger seats only long benches on the side. We filled the plane, the fortunate ones sat on the bench and the less fortunate sat on the floor. The doors were closed and a few minutes later the pilot started the engine, he tested it and the aeroplane slowly moved to the starting point on the edge of the aerodrome. Slowly the engines started roaring tremendously and the structure of the plane started shaking. A few minutes later I felt the plane leave the ground and the noise of the engines reduced.

We were leaving France and were on our way to England.

## **Chapter Five**

We left France late afternoon. The boys were joking and singing. About two hours later our plane landed in Oxford. We came out of the plane and under the supervision of the British officers we walked together into the building and to the reception room. There we had a cup of tea, a plate of chips and piece of fish. For the first time in my life I tasted English fish and chips and a cup of tea with milk. In Poland we never drank tea with milk it was very strange to me drinking it this way.

When we had finished our meals they told us we were going to barracks where we were staying for the night. The on duty airmen took us to the barracks where we were spending the night and at the same time he showed us where the toilets, bathrooms and the showers were. The barracks were lovely, nice and clean inside the beds were already made with white sheets pillows a blanket and a mattress. I put my little case on the bed and tested how soft and comfortable it would be for me that night.

After a while I got up took my towel and soap and went to the bathroom to have a good wash. When I finished washing and got back to my barracks I saw some friends playing a game of cards, poker or bridge. I was a little tired and had nothing do so I went to bed early and lay thinking about I would be doing the following morning,

The night passed, the following morning airmen came to our barracks woke us up and told us our breakfast was ready in the canteen. I got up dressed made my bed and took my towel and soap to the washroom. When I came back from the washroom some fellows were ready to go for breakfast. I put my gear away and joined my friends and we went together for breakfast.

When we got to the canteen it was a nice big dining room. We went straight to the counter where they were serving breakfast. There were two choices of breakfast: first fried egg, bacon and beans and the second was a choice of two kippers bread and tea, all help yourself.

During breakfast, one of the medical staff told us to be ready after breakfast because we were going for a medical check up. After breakfast we went to the medical room where they told us to take our clothing off to the waist. The examination was very quick as there were a couple of doctors. They asked us a few questions about what kind of illnesses we'd had. They checked my chest, eyes, and generally looked over my body and that was it. After the examination they told us we were going to Blackpool where the main depot of the Polish Air Force was based and we would get our uniforms and all our equipment there.

After dinner the same day we left for Oxford and went by train to Blackpool. The journey took a couple of hours, when we came from the train we were met by Polish and British officials. They already knew how many of us were arriving in Blackpool. The Polish official told us that we were going in small groups to different hotels. There was an English official in charge of each group.

Walking from the station to our hotel I noticed that Blackpool was a very nice place. I saw a lovely beach blue sea and lots of nice girls!! We had not walked very far when we had stopped in front of a hotel. The official who was in charge of us told us that this is where we would be staying for a few days. I looked at the hotel and saw a man standing in the door at the top of

the steps, about five steps. He greeted us with a smile on his face and in his eyes. The official had a conversation with the man who was the hotel owner. After a few minutes of talking the official said good day to us and left the hotel.

The owner of the hotel smiled at us and told us to go in, we went in and he took us upstairs and showed us a bedroom where we would be sleeping. Some fellows were alone in one bed room and in some there were two with two single beds. He also showed us where the bathroom and toilet were.

I shared a bedroom with my friend and we had two single beds. First of all, I had a good bath and shave. When I had finished I returned to my bedroom and saw my friend leaning on the window ledge and watching people walking along the promenade. He said what I nice, clean place Blackpool and the hotel were, especially in comparison to the rough places where we had been during our journey. A few minutes later we heard the sound of the gong it was a signal that the food was ready to be served.

We went down to the dining room where we met the owner of the hotel again. He showed us where to sit because he had a few holiday visitors. We sat at a table and a waitress brought our food ready on the plate. We had a three course meal and also a cup of tea with milk. After the meal I went up stairs. My friend came up later and suggested that we go for a walk to see the beach, the shops and the people and to have a general look around. Before we went out the owner told us the hotel was open until 11pm at night and then it would be closed so he told us not to be late.

We left the hotel and crossed the road and we were on the edge of the sea. Walking along the promenade the first thing I noticed was Blackpool Tower it reminded me of the Eifel Tower in Paris. On the other side of the road we saw lots of shops with plenty of toys and souvenirs. Everywhere was very well lit. We had a very nice walk and we saw how people were enjoying themselves, laughing and singing as they came out of the pubs. We did not have any English money so we could not buy anything. Anyway, we had had enough walking so we returned early before the hotel was locked.

When we got to our room I took my jacket and shoes off and went to the bathroom to wash. When I got back to my room, my friend was already in bed. I went to bed as well, relaxing and discussing what we were going to do the next day. Later, just before he went to sleep he said the best place was to be was in bed.

After a good nights sleep we heard the early morning gong, time to go down for breakfast. We got up without hesitation, washed and returned to my room where my friend was waiting for me so we could go down together for breakfast. We went down to the dining room where we met more of our friends sitting already by the table waiting for their breakfast.

A few minutes later the waitress brought a cereal and milk, the small dish was already on the table and she told us to help ourselves. When we'd had our cereal, the waitress collected the empty dishes and brought in the main breakfast. It was bacon, egg, fried tomatoes and fried bread it was the best breakfast I had ever had in my life! In Poland I had never had a fried breakfast. After breakfast I went upstairs.



Before we went out we heard the voice of the Polish fellow who was in charge of our group call us all down to the dining room. He told us what the next step would be. He told us to be ready in about half an hour because we were going to the main depot where we would get our uniforms and the rest of our equipment.

When he returned to the hotel we were already waiting for him and we went altogether to the depot, it was a big building. We went up to the first floor, where there was a big hall with all the equipment which we were all to receive, from battledresses to sets of needles. I squeezed all the equipment into a big bag which members of the forces used for carrying around their personal things. When everybody had been equipped and were happy, we returned to the hotel with our official. Before he left us he told us to be ready and prepared anytime, any day as we would soon be leaving Blackpool to go to a different place. We did not stop long in Blackpool only a few days.

One morning, the officer in charge of our group told us we would be moving that afternoon and please be ready and do not now leave the hotel. We had our last meal in the hotel. The owner was very sorry because we were leaving him. Late afternoon we left and said cheerio to him. We left Blackpool Central station for a new destination Sheerness. It was quite a long journey across the country from the west to the east, from the Irish Sea to the North Sea.

The little town of Sheerness lies on the edge of an island. It is very small and it was there we were accommodated in an air force camp. The airfield was the first and so the oldest in England. We were living in barracks with about thirty men in each. The barracks had been built on the side of the hill and we had a lovely view from the top. The first few days after we arrived at the camp, we were not allowed to go outside the camp.

After a couple of days they told us we were going to swear on the Bible.

The next day they prepared one of the empty barracks for the ceremony which was to take place the next morning. Later the same day they called us to the barracks where we sat on long benches similar to church pews and we waited for the ceremony. After a while the doors opened and I saw a priest, two civilians and one officer from the camp. They brought two big boxes of Bibles and they gave us one each, they were quite thick. Before they started they called our names from their list. When they had finished the priest had a few words about the Bible and about swearing on it. He told us during the swearing that everyone would raise the Bible in our hand and repeat the words after him.

The swearing had a lot of meanings: to be loyal to the country, the King of England and his family etc. when it was all over they told us we were now British. After the ceremony the priest shook our hands and we returned to the barracks and waited for a good dinner. We were the first Poles to be given British nationalisation.

Next day we received promotion in rank from airman to LAC. I had a little propeller badge which I sewed on to my sleeve and from that day on I became a member of the Royal Air Force, and we went on the pay roll too. Every two weeks we received our pay. It was the best and happiest day for us.

During our time in Sheerness we did very little as we had no job to do. Sometimes we had a few English lessons. Every day we were enjoying ourselves playing cards or chess. Sometimes we went to Chatham by bus.

Chatham was a naval town, when there we would have a couple of drinks in a bar or sometimes we went to the cinema.

We spent the Christmas of 1939 in Sheerness. We had a nice Christmas dinner with a Christmas pudding. In Poland we spent our Christmas' in a different way. We would have our Christmas supper on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas Day. We would start our supper when the first star appeared in the night sky. The children usually looked for the star, when they spotted it they came running indoors shouting, "Mum the star is in the sky and now we can start supper!"

After supper the older people, mother, father, uncles, aunties would go to church at midnight for the mass and the children would stay at home with another adult. The winters in Poland were very cold about -25 degrees, with lots of snow everywhere.

The family walked together in the direction of the church hearing the squeak of crisp snow under their feet. In the distance they would hear the choirboys singing carols and the church bells ringing. The church was always full of people with not an empty space left. During the service there was singing and prayers, then they would all walk home. The children received their presents the next day.

We spent our Christmas in Sheerness quietly, singing Polish carols, with some friends we played cards, poker or bridge.

After Christmas and New Year we were still working very little. They told us that we would soon be going to go on a training course. After a week we were transferred to Carlisle. Our airfield was a few miles from Carlisle where we had our accommodation and living quarters. After a day in camp we started our training. It was exciting to sit in an airplane again. The first type of plane was a Magistese, it was a very light two-seater usually used for teaching pupils.

I had one test flight with an instructor it took one hour and forty five minutes and after that time I was flying by myself. During training we had different types of flights for example: local flying and landing, cross country, acrobatics, low flying etc. when we had finished the programme on the Magistese we were transferred to a Hucknall.

It was a little town not far from Nottingham. Our camp was about two miles from Hucknall. We lived in the same camp side by side the British airmen; we all had duties in the camp day and night. We were all very busy, flying in the morning and in the afternoon as well. We had a different plane it was a Fairey-battle, it was bigger and heavier, looking more like a war plane.

The programme was different from the first one. We were flying in formation 3.2.1, 1.2.3, or 2.3.1, dual flying, circuit flying and landing, blind take off, map reading. Also war load flying, taking photographs, level bombing and low flying at two and one hundred feet.

Sometimes we flew an Anson plane which had two engines. It was hard work flying the Anson because the under carriage was operated by hand and the handle was on the right hand side

of the seat. The pilot could only use one hand to bring the undercarriage up or down and at the same time he had to keep an eye on the plane making sure that the steering is under control.

When we returned to our barracks after a days work, we were free until the next morning duty. It was up to us to do as we wanted. Wearily everybody after their meal had a wash and a shave and when they were looking more respectable, decided where to go. We sometimes went to the local bar in Hucknall or for a longer journey by bus to Nottingham. Monday to Friday we went in to Hucknall. Usually, we walked it was quite pleasant walking through the countryside. The little town had a few public houses where we would mostly spend our spare time and money for drinking and smoking. In the pubs we met a few people who were very nice and friendly to us. They would often buy us drinks for us and insist that we have a drink with them.

On Saturdays we mostly travelled by bus to Nottingham. Nottingham was a famous town with the reputation for the most beautiful girls in England. There we would have a good time in a big dance hall, where we could drink, eat and dance. There was no shortage of pretty girls for dancing with. After the dance we were always in a hurry to say goodbye to the girls and to catch the last bus back to Hucknall.

When we arrived at Hucknall we had another twenty minute walk to the camp, because there were no buses after 11 pm. During the walk to the camp we often sang some of our Polish songs. As we got closer to the gate we would ask each other what the password was for the night, because at night time you could not get through the gate without it. Every night the camp had a different password. We did not have any problems getting through the gate, because the English guard on duty could hear the half drunken Polish airmen coming back. They knew we were friends and not strangers as we were living together in the same camp. We often shared jokes as we went through the procedures of getting in to camp.

While we were in Hucknall, I lost my best friend.

We had joined the Polish air force in the same year, we were recruits together and had both been chosen for pilot school, after passing through tough medical, physical and mental examinations. During the war we were separated and met again at the aerodrome in Romania. I had left him behind in Romania because I received my passport first. After a couple of weeks we met up again on the boat at Baleik and from that time on we were together until the fatal accident in Hucknall.

One day during training in Hucknall, the lorry arrived outside the camp as usual to take us to the aerodrome. When we heard the driver give a signal with his horn we ran from the barracks to the lorry to take our seats but not everyone got on. The driver thought everything was OK and started moving slowly. My friend seeing the lorry going away started running after it and managed to catch it and hang on. Unfortunately he couldn't manage to climb in and lost his grip and fell in to the middle of the road and badly injured his head, two hours later he died. He was buried in a small cemetery in Hucknall.

I and everybody else were sad and sorry to lose such a nice and good friend. He was really very popular and made us laugh; he was a real comedian. After the accident the driver was

ordered to check that everyone was on board and safe and secure before moving the vehicle away.

Anyway, after we finished the course we were transferred to the aerodrome at Bramcote. The aerodrome was a mile and a half from the town of Nuneaton and about six miles from Coventry. We settled down to business straight away and we had more excitement because they told us that this was our last course, then we would be going straight in to an active squadron. Here we had all our training in Wellington bombers...

During our stay at Bramscote in 1941 we had a very bad winter and a lot of snow on the ground. Before we started to fly we helped to clear the snow from the runway. During the day a snow plough was working all the time. After a few days the weather changed and we didn't have much snow fall and it was possible to take off and land. We were in Bramscote from January 1941 to the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1941. During our training we had a lot of German bombers flying over our head. I remember quite clearly one day in the late evening when we had finished flying and we were going to our barracks. Suddenly I heard a German bomber Dornier flying very low over our aerodrome and it dropped about five bombs on the front hanger. The last bomb hit the door off the hanger and started a fire inside. Each bomb made a small crater. When I heard the bomb explode I fell flat on the ground and covered my head with my hands waiting and listening for more explosions.

The aerodrome was protected by heavy anti-aircraft guns and heavy machine guns but the Germans had surprised us. We didn't expect this to happen to us, but before our guns could start shooting the Germans had dropped the bombs and flown away, and it was all over. I got up brushed the dust off myself and walked to my barracks. We did not take too much notice of the Germans flying over us.

After a days work we just wanted to get out of the camp to go to Nuneaton and have a good time. We mostly spent our times in the pubs where we met some new friends. They were very good to us and wanted to know everything about us, what we were doing here, why we had come to England and some asked silly questions.

I will never forget one day when I was in Nuneaton, I went with friends to the little neighbouring town Hinckley by train to find the best beer and some nice people. It was not too far away from Nuneaton. All evening we were drinking quite a lot. When the barman called "Last orders please!" we were already on our way to catch the train to Nuneaton. When we got on the train I felt very tired and I sat in the corner near the window. I didn't remember anything after that until I was disturbed by the conductor. He told me the train wasn't going on any further. When I asked him where I was he told me I was in Crewe station. He asked me where I wanted to go. I told him I'd like to go to Nuneaton station. He was a very nice fellow he took me to the platform where I could get the train back to Nuneaton. He told the duty porter to put me on the next train.

I was waiting quite a long time for the next train. In the end I got on the train but this time I kept my eyes open all the way to the camp. I was very tired and sleepy when I arrived in my destination. I just had time to have a wash, clean my shoes, brush my uniform and have breakfast of egg, bacon, toast and a cup of tea.

One night when we were sleeping peacefully in our beds we were suddenly awoken by anti-aircraft guns which were placed around our camp. It was hell, noisy in the air from the German bombers and we heard explosions in the distance. It was an air raid on Coventry and the sky was covered with beams of the searchlights. The air raid lasted 24 hours and our beds were moving and jumping about as all the barracks were shaken. The air raid on Coventry was the longest and the biggest on a single town, about a thousand bombers flew over the town and dropped their bombs.

After hours of bombing we had an order to go to the air raid shelter because bombs had been dropped near our airfield as we were only about six miles from Coventry. We spent the rest of the night and early morning in the shelter. The same night Italian bombers joined the Germans to bomb Coventry. The Italian leader Mussolini asked Herr Hitler for permission to be involved in the bombing. That night and day Coventry was completely flattened to the ground and the beautiful and famous Coventry cathedral was destroyed and thousands of people were killed.

## **Chapter Six**

Near the end of our course they told us we were going to 105 squadron at Syerston in full crews, my crew was Sergeant first and second pilot, flight lieutenant, observer, Flight officer, front gunner, Sergeant radio operator and Sergeant rear gunner.

When we arrived at our permanent station in Syerston we felt more and more excited, we knew that we were there for real business. On that station all members of crews had single rooms and we had our own keys to our doors. Inside we had a bed with a soft mattress, and close to the bed was a small cabinet with drawers a big locker and a chair. Our station Syerston was midway between Newark six miles away and Lincoln eight miles. Nottingham was a further 20 miles away.

The first few days I felt very strange to be by myself in a little room, up until then we had been living in barracks with fifteen lads together or in a large room with four mates together.

For two days all crews had a general briefing and tested all equipment to make sure that it was in working order. Next day they called us to the briefing room, we guessed that it meant we would be on operation to Germany that night. All destinations and targets, they kept secret until the last hour before we were to take off.

On the first operation day everybody at the station was very busy, ground crew, mechanics, electricians, radio operators and other staff tested and checked equipment. Airmen brought bombs on small trolleys and hung them underneath the planes. We, the flying crew were relaxing, sitting in the restroom reading newspapers or playing games of bridge or poker.

About 9.30 pm they called us to the briefing room once more where we got all the information. In the room was a big map hanging on the wall. The map was of Europe and England. They told us the most important things, where the German fighters would mostly be concentrated, where the big guns were placed on the ground and where the search lights were. They also told us where the beacons were placed in England. The beacons were very important to us for navigating. Each beacon had a different letters every night. For example when I saw beacon letters B.E. I'd know it was from the seashore at Skegness, lettered Z.M. might be from Lowestoft and so on, changing every night. We had quite a few beacons around the coast.

Half an hour before we took off all crews collected from the store a parachute, a pistol with a magazine of bullets, an emergency ration of food consisting of biscuits and chocolate which were packed in waterproof material. We also received foreign money, German, Dutch and French. Outside the building a lorry was already waiting to take us to our planes which were spread around the aerodrome. We put our parachutes on the lorry and climbed in to take our seats.

On the way to the plane we felt more excited; the boys were joking and laughing all the way. The ground crew were already there waiting for us when we arrived. Steps had been lowered from under the plane in readiness. One by one, we climbed up to the plane, two air gunners took their seats in the front and the observer and the radio operator sat side by side behind the pilot partition. When we were all inside the plane, the steps were lifted up and the doors

were closed. The first pilot would ask if everyone had intercom connection and tested them to make sure they were in good working order.

When all the crew were OK the pilot gave the signal to the ground crew to connect the battery. When they signalled that it was connected, the pilot pressed the ignition button to start the left engine, the propeller turned a few times and the engine started. The same procedure was repeated for the right engine. When both engines were running, the pilot tested the engines by pushing the throttle lever gently and watching the revolutions of the propeller, the oil pressure and the temperature. Once the throttle lever was in maximum position all the plane structure was shaking and jerking and the noise was tremendous. After about ten seconds, the pilot brought the throttle lever to its normal position and the noise and jerks reduced to a gentle vibration. There was still one last job; the testing of the wings, tail flaps and steering.

When the pilot had finished his checks he gave a signal to the ground crew to take away the stopping blocks from under the wheels. The ground crew pulled them away by strings that were attached to them for safety and gave a signal that all was OK to the pilot. The pilot would then start to slowly taxi down to the runway at one end of the aerodrome. Every plane got a separate signal from the control tower. It was our turn once we got to the main runway. The first pilot pressed the brakes hard and at the same time pushed the throttle levers to maximum position to get full revolution of the propellers. After a few seconds he released the brakes this way the plane got quicker speed to get off the ground in a short time.

The noise of the engines was tremendous; the poor Wimpy had a full load of bombs and couldn't quickly get enough speed to take off. It was a long way to the end of the runway and our Wimpy was a good plane. Once we had reached 110 miles, the first pilot slowly pulled the steering column and we left the ground. Once the Wimpy was airborne the pilot pushed the button to lift the undercarriage.

I was sitting side by side with the first pilot, I was second pilot because he was much older and had been in the Polish Air Force and had done twice as many flying hours than I had and had more experience. We were climbing all the time and when we reached the English coast we were about five thousand feet up. My heart started beating faster. I felt very tense and I think all my friends were thinking the same way. I could see water underneath and knew we were flying through the war-zone, because German Messerschmitts had been dominating our waters and our bombers. Some had been unlucky and had been shot down over the English Channel before they had even reached the Dutch borders.

The radio operator switched off all the communication with the ground and kept silent. The Germans could listen on their transmission and they would know we were on the way. This would have enabled them to send our position to their fighter planes.

We were climbing continuously because we wanted to be as high as possible. The Wimpy did its best but could not get high quickly. All the crew kept their eyes on the lookout for the Messerschmitt. The two air gunners in their tower had a good view, the radio operator left his seat and took his position looking through the astro-window. The first pilot and I kept looking through the front window and the observer stayed in his place until we were nearer the target.

We were half way across the channel, the sky was very clear and there were no clouds in the sky, it was just very quiet just the noise of the propellers. We kept our fingers crossed hoping that there would be no fighters around. We still climbed knowing we we'd soon be over Holland. When we came closer to the Dutch coast we saw searchlights and smoke shaped like small clouds in the sky. They were the explosions from heavy gun fire as they were shooting at other planes in the attack; some had been caught in the searchlights.

We were keeping our fingers crossed hoping to get at least twelve thousand feet up before we reached our target as the higher up we would be safer from the heavy guns. Luck was with us as we crossed the Dutch border and flew in the direction of Germany. All the searchlights and the guns had missed us. When we crossed the German border we could see illuminations in the air and on the ground where there were fires all around. We still kept our fingers crossed as we got closer to Emden, our target, and we still climbed higher. Our Wimpy just about managed to get to the magic twelve thousand feet.

Our observer left his desk and came down, under the two pilots seats was a navigation window, he lay on his stomach to get a good view of the target and he gave directions to the pilot to go to the left or the right. When we got closer to the target, I couldn't believe what I could see there were so many explosions around our Wimpy but the pilot could not change course. Ignoring all the flack he flew straight for his goal and followed the observer's instructions. He did his calculations and measurements on his navigational instruments taking consideration of our height, speed of the plane and the wind drift. When everything was OK the pilot opened the bomb doors ready and when we were on target the navigator made any small adjustments and told the pilot which way to turn.

When we were in position the observer released the bombs and at the same time we felt our Wimpy lift up and we felt she was lighter. It was a sign that the bombs had gone to hit the target and our job had been done successfully, as the bombs were dropped the pilot turned our Wimpy back for home in full throttle and with the little nose down to get maximum speed. On the way home we again crossed the Dutch border the first pilot asked me to take over as he wanted to get some rest and stretch his body. He had been sitting for over three hours without any free movement. It was usual for the first pilot to fly to the target and after the bombs were dropped and when the operation was finished he would ask the second pilot to relieve him for the flight back.

It was my turn. When we reached the English Channel we knew we were safer. The plane was doing maximum speed and we reduced our heights. We felt more relaxed and we knew we would soon reach the British coast. We had crossed midway over the channel and on the horizon we could see lights appearing. Around us the sky was grey and misty. It would take about another half an hour for us to reach the British coast.

It was 5am when we flew over England, all the crew were relieved and happy because we were soon to put down in Syerston. The ground crew were waiting for us on landing; they were glad to see us back safely and were cheering. The flight had taken six hours and forty minutes.

When we came out of the plane we went on the vehicle which took us to the interrogation room. They were all there waiting for us to see if we had anything to say. After our statements the observer and front gunner went to the officer's mess and we went to the sergeant's mess



where breakfast was ready for us. I had bacon, fried eggs beans and toast a slice of bread and a cup of tea. During breakfast it was a nice feeling to meet my friends from the other crews. We were happy together that we had come home safely. We exchanged our experiences during the flight it was a very exciting conversation.

After breakfast I went to my room where I was going to get a good rest. Before I went to bed I had a good wash shave and shower, after which I went to bed and stayed there sleeping until midday. Then I would get up wash get dressed and go to dinner. We had a meeting in the briefing room where I found out that our crew were not going out on operation again that night. They told us we would be busy the next day 4<sup>th</sup> may 1941.

I spent my free evening with my friends in the sergeants mess playing a game of poker. After closing time I went to my room got in to bed and slept until the next morning. The next day after breakfast and dinner all crews prepared for that nights operation.

I am not going to tell you all the details of what and where we went and what we did on operation days whilst we were waiting for take off.

I had nine operations:

No1 Emden	flying time 6 hours 40 minutes.
No2 Havre	flying time 5 hours 20 minutes
No3 Havre	flying time 5 hours 20 minutes
No4 Bremen	flying time 6 hours 35 minutes
No5 Hamburg	flying time 6 hours 40 minutes
No6 Osnabruck	flying time 6 hours
No7 Brest	flying time 5 hour 5 minutes
No8 Duisburg	flying time 5 hour 5 minutes
No9 Bremen	from which I did not return.

All operations were the same before take off every night during the flight was different. We always kept our fingers crossed and hope that we would be lucky that night. The Polish squadrons lost one or two planes a night during the operations. On the third flight we were scared to death. Our mission was to the port of Le Havre in France which was on the English Channel opposite Brighton. The course was to cross the English Channel to Holland then fly along the coast to Belgium and then France. The target was German warships which were undercover at the port of Le Havre. We were always under the threat from the night fighters, search lights and heavy guns. When we got close to the target our radio operator shouted to us to look out for two Messerschmitt which were about three hundred metres away on our right side. We were on the edge of the coast and they were on the channel side. Everyone of the crew kept an eye on them. We were praying that they would not spot us. We were very fortunate and managed to get through the search lights, guns and at the same time loose the Messerschmitt because they would not fly over the target where the heavy guns were in action.

Our observer gave the pilot directions to where the bombs dropped. When we came near to the target the pilot opened the bomb doors and the observer decided when the bombs should be released. When the bombs were gone the pilot turned the Wimpy to the right and over the English Channel in the direction of England.

When we were nearer the English coast we could see our beacon which would give us our position. We changed course in the direction of our station at Syerston. After a while my friend asked me to take over the plane. All the crew relaxed because we were now flying over England. When we landed the ground crew as usual were waiting for us. When we left the aircraft they took over the plane from us for maintenance, checking the engines and getting it ready for the next night's operation.

As usual we prepared ourselves for operation number nine our target was Bremen.

We took off flying over the English coast and over the North Sea keeping our eyes open for enemy fighters. It was a lovely full moonlit night; we could see every plane on the horizon looking to the north side. In the front of us we could see the Dutch coast and we kept our fingers crossed as everything was going well.

About five minutes later when we crossed the Dutch coast our rear gunner shouted that a Messerschmitt was following us. We dived down and changed the course hoping we could lose him. We settled for a few minutes and we went back to our original course happily. Suddenly we heard a terrific noise of machine gun at that moment the two gunners' front and rear were shot and our left engine went up in smoke. I was standing near my seat at the time.

After the shooting had stopped I went down to see the front gunner. When I opened the hatch door I could see him leaning sideways with blood all over him, there was no sign of life... he was dead. Our first pilot shouted to us to prepare for jumping out, we were losing height and the engine was on fire. The radio operator who was looking through the astral window went to see the rear gunner and unfortunately he found he was also dead. We had plenty of time to jump and we had about eight thousand feet to spare. The four of us were ready to abandon the plane but we were feeling very sad to leave our friends behind. When we were ready to jump I went down to open the door ready for us to jump. Looking up I saw the observer and radio operator waiting for their turn to jump. The first pilot was doing his best to keep the plane under control and waiting for us to jump. I waved to them and jumped out.

After a while I pulled the parachute handle and in seconds the parachute opened. While I was floating and hanging in the air my left hand was tangled between the parachute line and my sleeve was torn under my arm. Looking down I could see Holland underneath, behind me I could see the North Sea. I was hoping and praying that I would be able to drift to the land not to the sea. When I was in the air it seemed to me that I was falling very slowly and it was very peaceful around me. I was looking up and down thinking I may see my friends but I didn't see them. After a while I came closer to the ground about a thousand feet and now I was falling faster. Suddenly I heard a whirring in my ears and I fell in to a garden among some potato bushes.

## **Chapter Seven**

I had a very soft landing a few feet from a channel full of water. The first thing on my mind was to hide my parachute somewhere to mislead the germane. I pulled my parachute close to me and folded it into a big ball. I still had the problem of where to hide it. In my mind was to put the parachute in the water and when the tide went out it would take the parachute out with it. I threw the parachute in to the water and I noticed it was floating and did not move an inch. I tried to find something to push it far down in to the water.

I turned a walked a few steps and noticed about fifty feet away there were three men leaning behind a fence and watching me all the time. I knew they were Dutch men and I went straight over to them to ask for help. They invited me inside their home .it was a very big house. I was going with them through a long hall to the living room. They asked me to sit down. The two boys stopped with me but the boy's father went out.

I could see further down the room that a door was open and a lady in a long pink dressing gown came in to us and asked me if I wanted a drink, I said yes please and she left us. The sons whose ages were about seventeen and nineteen years old noticed that I had a pistol sticking out of my boot cuff, they asked me to give it to them and I said that they could have it if they could give me any jacket and trousers in return. The lady who was their mother soon returned with a small tray with a glass of water with some fruit juice in it. I was really very thirsty and I drank it in one gulp, the boys continued to beg me for my pistol.

Suddenly, I heard very heavy footsteps coming from the hall. I straight away recognised them as German footsteps. In a few seconds I pulled the pistol from my boot cuff and gave it to one of the boys, he took it and ran to the next room. Seconds later the door was opened and two Germans came in with the boy's father. One of the Germans immediately searched my body and pockets. During the search one of the Germans asked me where I had left my parachute. I said I did not know but it was in a field somewhere. The Dutchman interrupted and told them he had got it in his back garden. I felt terrible because I was lying. I did not think that the Dutchman would tell them where my parachute was. I found out that he had gone out and brought the two Germans back and gave them my parachute.

While they were searching my pockets, one of the Germans found bullets from my pistol in the top pocket of my battledress. He asked me where my pistol was and I told him I must have lost it t had fallen from my boot cuff and I showed them where I normally kept it. I looked at the boys faces and wondered what they were going to do..... Tell the Germans they had got it or keep silent.

When they had finished searching me one of them opened the door and showed me the way out. One was in front of me and one behind. When we came out of the house they told me to get in to and vehicle similar to an American jeep. We went together and drove some distance. When we stopped we got out and went in to a building which was a local school. One of the rooms was being used for interrogation. When I went in I saw about four tables in a row with Germans sitting behind them. I stood in front of the Germans and they looked at me.

The two guards who had taken me there told them what they knew about me. I could only guess at what they were saying. When they had finished talking they walked away and one of

the Germans behind the table asked me my name. When I told them he said. "You are a Pole not an Englishman. I kept silent, then other German got up from the chair and came to me and said in Polish "you Polish swine" and slapped my face. I still did not give a reply. They still asked me the same questions a few times, and I still told them I had come from England.

According to the war convention prisoner only had to give his name and rank and address of next of kin. They knew about this and stopped their questioning. After a short time two guardsmen came and took me with them to a vehicle and again we travelled for quite a long time. When we stopped we were in an army camp in Amsterdam. It was early morning and the weather was becoming beautiful and it was very warm. On duty at the gate there was a German guard and he admitted us to the compound.

We got out of the vehicle and went together inside the building which was a prison. Inside we met a duty guard; he took me to the first floor and locked me up in one of the cells. I was very tired and took my boots off and lay on the bed which was the only thing in the room. Again I wondered what was going to happen to me next.

Outside the cell I heard footsteps someone was walking along the corridor. At times I heard calls of "guard, guard", coming from the other cells. After a while I wanted to go to the toilet, I was shouting and knocking to let the guard know. Eventually a German came to open the door he already knew what I wanted before I told him. He showed me the way. Walking along the corridor I noticed there were about a dozen cells. On my way to the toilet I met my friend from a different air crew, but the same squadron coming towards me. We said hello to each other but we could not stop to talk as the guard was pushing us and told us to keep going.

When I got back to my cell the German locked the door behind me I again lay on my bed but this time wondered when I would get some food it was about seven o'clock in the morning. A lot happened to me during that night and I was now very hungry. Later on a guard opened the door and brought me a cup of mint tea, a piece of bread and margarine and a small amount of jam.

I stayed in the cell until late afternoon when the guard came to my cell and took me outside onto the compound for some exercise. I walked up and down near the wall of the prison building. A guard with an automatic gun was about fifty feet away in the middle of the compound and was keeping an eye on me. The weather was very nice and hot. Looking far down beyond the wire fence I could see a big hotel. Outside the hotel German officers were sitting at tables under umbrellas in the company of pretty girls. They were drinking and laughing very loudly, how I would have enjoyed a glass of beer then. I spent two days and nights in the cell in Amsterdam.

Lying in the bed during the night I heard the sound of our planes flying over Holland they were my friends keeping their fingers crossed as I had done. How I wished I was up there with them as well.

After breakfast on the third day, two Germans came in to my cell and took me out. When I came out in to the compound I noticed a mini bus was waiting. When I stepped inside the bus there were already about six unlucky men sitting in separate seats I sat between them. During the journey we could not speak to each other, we kept silent. We had quite a long journey

about two hundred and fifty kilometres and we arrived in Frankfurt. Germany has two towns named Frankfurt, one lies on the river Rhine and that is the one we had arrived at.

When we got out we could see we were at a very nice place it looked like a convalescent home. They put us in single rooms they were very nice and very clean. I had a soft bed with white clean sheets and feather pillows. At the side of the bed was stool and near the window was a little table and chair. Through the window I could see a lot of trees and a big lawn surrounded by flowers. We had arrived there at midday. All our meals were brought to us on a tray by the guards. During the day and night we were locked and guarded. The next day and after a good nights sleep in this soft bed I felt good. At about seven o'clock I heard the door being unlocked and the guards let me go to the bathroom and toilet. When I had washed I returned to my room and the door was locked once more. Later that morning the door was unlocked and the guard brought my breakfast. Once I had eaten it he took my tray and locked me in once more.

About half an hour later I had a big surprise. The door was opened and in front of me I saw a German officer with medals on his chest. He said good morning to me and asked me how I was, he walked into my room and went and sat down on the chair. I was sitting on the bed. The first words were from him and he asked me what I thought about the Germans invading Russia and the Russians crossing the Polish border. He opened his cigarette case and offered me a cigarette. I told him I did not smoke but thanked him. He tried to persuade me to join the German air force telling me I would be treated very well; I simply said "no"! I did not want to become involved in conversation with him. In the end he saw it was no use trying any further so he got up and walked away and the door was locked once more.

I spent one more night there. The next morning after breakfast the door was unlocked as usual and the guards told me to get out of the room. We were walking in the direction of the exit, I thought they may be moving us to a different camp and I was right. When I got outside he showed me to the mini bus which I entered and took my single seat. There were others in there but as before we again were unable to converse.

We arrived at a railway station which was quite small. We got out of the mini bus went to a goods train and climbed into the wagon. We were sitting on the floor and occupying half of the wagon, the other half was occupied by the guards. We had a quite a long journey, I could not check the time because the Germans at the previous camp had taken all personal belongings, watches, photographs, cigarettes, gold chains and crosses, lighters etcetera. All these things had been put into individual envelopes which were sealed and named. It was very uncomfortable sitting on the floor and I kept getting cramp in my legs. From time to time I was allowed to stretch them to relieve the pain. I could only hope the journey would be over soon.

Eventually the train stopped in a small village. We got out of the wagon and made a formation of two: one guard was in front and the other one was behind us. We walked through the village; it was not a very long walk. In the end we stopped in front of a wire gate. Behind the gate was a guard who opened the gate and we went on walking further on to the guard house where we were told to halt.

Outside I could see Germans sitting near the wall on a bench it looked as if they were sunbathing, because the weather was very nice and hot. Even further there was another wire fence beyond which there were prisoners shouting to us. We couldn't say anything but we recognised that they were British.

The duty officer called us in to the hut one by one where another German sat behind a table. He asked me my name checked the papers and gave me disk with my name and my personal identity number. I wore the disk around my neck all the time. It was made of metal and was divided in to half by a perforated line; on both halves were my name, identity number No.39137 and the name of Staleg 1Xc. I then had two more discs one British and one German. The British disc was made from very light metal and had my name and identity number No.780746.

Once each of us had our identification they took us to the other gate where our fellow prisoners were waiting for us. The gate was unlocked and opened for us. As we entered the duty officer told us to follow him. We started walking and within seconds some of the prisoners that were waiting for us ran to us and asked us for the latest news and how things were in England. They were very pleased to see us and were asking lots of different questions. The guard showed us to a hut where we went inside, he showed us where our beds were and left us.

I was horrified with what I saw. The hut was long and narrow, dark and very dirty. In the middle was an iron stove with a long chimney attached to it that went up to the ceiling. On both sides of the hut were bunk beds three high and close together.

Looking down the hut I saw men lying on the beds with missing limbs, it made me more depressed seeing these poor men. When we had conversations with them they told us the tragic stories about what happened to them and why so many were wounded or had died. They told us they were fighting in France during the retreat at Dunkirk. The Germans had shot at them indiscriminately ignoring the fact that they had there hands held up and were surrendering. After talking to them, I walked away saying I would come and see them later.

I went to find my bed where I would be sleeping; I chose a top bunk so I would have a good view of the whole hut. I climbed up and saw the bed only had a straw mattress and one blanket.

About half an hour later we heard a whistle which was a signal for roll call. Everybody had to get out on to the compound and make a formation of five in one row. Once we were all outside the Germans counted us in blocks of five. When they finished counting they compared the number with the list he had in his hand. Whenever the numbers differed the guards recounted and started looking for the missing men. They searched every hut checking all the beds because someone may still be sleeping, they also searched the toilets.

Sometimes the search took a long time and we were left waiting, standing in the compound in all weathers. In the summer time we didn't mind but during the winter time when the temperature in Germany was -25 to 30 degrees centigrade and not pleasant at all. During the winter there seemed to be constant snow and ice on the ground. Keeping myself warm was

very hard because when I was captured I only had my underwear and battledress, trousers and a pair of shoes on my feet. All my friends were in the same situation.

Life in camp IXc was quite easy. The Germans did not bother us. Every morning after breakfast, a group of fellows went to the kitchen for peeling potatoes. In the kitchen were two big boilers near the wall. The Germans placed a big heap of potatoes each day in the middle of the kitchen. That would be our ration for the next day. The potatoes for that day were already peeled and cooking in the big iron boilers. Every man brought his own knife and a small stool to sit on. We sat around the heap of potatoes and peeled them. It took us until midday to finish them. Every day ten different men did the job. We had a rota for all the jobs that had to be done.

In the camp there were a lot of disabled men who were unable to do any work. Each morning we cleaned our hut. The floor was swept, and all the rubbish, empty cans papers and boxes were taken out. In the winter we had extra work cleaning and taking the ashes out of the stove and getting our daily ration of coal.

Each day about a dozen men were on duty and working and the rest of us pleased ourselves what to do. We could play games of cards, chess, kick a ball around, sleep, and walk around the camp, write letters, read books and do our own hobbies.

We had a ration of food every day. In the morning, one cup of mint tea, at midday two medium size potatoes and in the evening we had another cup of mint tea, a small square of margarine, a small spoon of jam or marmalade and one loaf of bread to share between six men. Usually the same man was in charge of cutting and sharing it between us. A slice of bread was one and a half inches thick. I always divided it into three pieces. One I would have for tea, one for my breakfast and the last one with my lunch. But sometimes when I was very hungry I ate the whole lot.

During our time in there we had newcomers arriving on camp very often. They were from the British air force and from time to time we had a few Polish boys as well.

When I arrived at the camp the first thing the Germans did was to take us in to the showers where we had a good wash. We were then sent to the delousing room where our clothes were disinfected and we were also sprayed with disinfectant powder. That first night I slept on the top bunk with my two mates on the lower ones. The bed was very dirty and had only one blanket on it. I took my shoes and socks off and put them at the bottom of my bed, my trousers and jacket, I rolled up and used for a pillow. I lay under the blanket wondering how long I would be staying in that camp.

After about half an hour later I felt bites on my back, chest and legs. I guessed they were lice biting my body. I couldn't sleep and I was disturbed all night, waiting for daylight to let me catch and kill these creatures. The next morning nearly all the newcomers were covered in bites. The fellows who had been there a long time said the lice liked fresh bodies and attacked eagerly biting very hard. After breakfast I took my blanket and mattress outside and gave them a good beating and a good shaking. I hoped that all the dust and dirt would come out, and that the next night would be different.

We stayed at camp IXC all the summer and winter.

During the first two and a half months we were short of food and were hungry all the time. We only had the food the Germans gave us. We didn't have any proper soap for washing ourselves or our clothing. We did get a very small square of soap from the Germans but we could not get any lather with it and it was supposed to last for two weeks.

Later on things changed and it was much better. The Red Cross started sending some food parcels. We received two different food parcels, one was from England and one was from Canada. The contents of the two parcels were:

Butter, condensed milk, powder milk(KLIM) from Canada we also had sardines, herrings, corned beef, sugar, coffee a packet of tea and some sugar. We also had biscuits, jam, chocolate and cigarettes (tins of fifty) and sometimes raisins and prunes.

From that time on we were not dependent on the German food. We made our own tea; the Germans boiled the water for us. With the German food and parcels we received each week this was sufficient for me. Sometimes when supplies were very low we shared one parcel between two, three or more men. The Germans kept all our food parcels in the store on their side of the fence. One of our men was in charge and he decided how the food was to be allocated.

The camp was very small so we did not have any special ground for games like football or basketball. We only had a small space between the huts, the kitchen, the shower house and the toilets. So many men were now arriving that we were becoming overcrowded. On the side of the camp behind the wire a few metres away was a little stream. I usually walked behind the huts for exercise. I could see a lot of wildlife and nature on the other side of the fence, birds' butterflies and dragonflies. There were lots of trees shrubs and between them, wild flowers.

We washed our clothing ourselves. I made my own washing machine, it was an ordinary bucket and an empty tin with a few holes around it this was nailed to the end of a stick about three feet long and made my washing very easy. All the dirty things were put into the bucket; I'd get some hot water from the kitchen when it was available. I cut the tablet of soap in very small pieces and mixed them together with the washing. The stick was like the traditional dhobi stick, I pushed down and up squeezing the dirt from the washing. It took quite a long time to get the washing clean. After this, I rinsed it all in clean water using the same method in the bucket. I then hung it outside or put it on the grass behind the huts. On sunny days the washing would dry very quickly.

Stalag IXC was a good camp for us and we had a good supply of food from the Red Cross. The Germans came to see us as if we were friends and we did business with them. They gave us some onions and we would give them a few cigarettes, we could get anything from them in this way.

They were quite relaxed because they were winning the war between the Russians and the Germans. The Germans had gone through Poland, crossed the Russian border and went in to Russian territory. They had killed millions and taken many prisoners.



One day the Germans made a surprise for us, in one day one of the empty huts had been prepared into a temporary cinema. They hung a white sheet at the end of the hut, brought in a projector and film and then a few benches to sit on in front of the screen. Only a few fellows had seats the rest of us had to stand. When the news so spread in the camp that we were going to see a film, everybody cheered and was very pleased.

The film was to start in the afternoon. When we filled the hut and the window shutters were closed the film started. At the beginning the film showed hundreds of German tanks and soldiers marching in to Poland. In the film, I saw Germans in battle on the ground with heavy tanks against the Polish cavalry on horses. I saw German planes shooting indiscriminately at women and children, who were running for cover to the nearest trees and bushes. Villages and towns were bombed and were on fire.

I was shocked when I saw in the film two Germans holding a banner of the army regiment number 54 which was my town regiment in Tarnopol. I knew that friends of mine in that regiment had been killed in the battle of the town Kutno which was on the way to Warsaw. I was really upset and wished that I had not seen this. I had the sight of the Germans stamping on the Polish banner in my mind for a few days.

Life on the camp was the same as when I arrived four months before. Autumn and winter was in front of us and we now needed better clothing. The Germans gave me a pair of Dutch wooden clogs. The first couple of days walking in them was very difficult, but I got used to them very quickly and soon they were very comfortable. Later, the Red Cross sent us some blankets which were very handy as extra cover.

We had quite a hard winter with plenty of snow on the ground but we had a lot of fun with the snow. At Christmas we received special parcels with Christmas puddings.

Some friends were short of cigarettes and decided to do some extraordinary things for bets, and one of them was going to run around the huts twice with no clothes or shoes on for five hundred cigarettes. They were collected and counted and the exhibition started. When he was running round the hut nearly a hundred men were waiting for him with dozens of snowballs in their hands. It was part of the bargain that the spectators could throw them at him as he passed. When he finished his two rounds, his friends were waiting with a blanket and towel on the steps of his hut. As he ran up to the hut his mates put the blanket around him and took him inside the hut. He was very shaky and very cold, his back and legs were covered in bruises, he was also wet and his head was covered in snow which was sticking to his hair.

They took him to bed and gave him a good massage, then he dried his body and hair, dressed put his shoes on and said he was going for a game of poker and thanked them very much.

After Christmas and New Year we had some good news, it was said that we would be moving to a different camp, but we did not know when. Weeks and months passed and still we were in Stalag IXc camp. Spring arrived the weather was very nice and hot, the trees and the fields outside the camp were covered with green leaves and grass.

One morning some Germans came in to the camp and told us to be ready in one hour because we were leaving. We were very pleased to hear this news as the camp was very small and

overcrowded. I packed my possessions and the blanket which I had received from the Red Cross, a couple of tins of food, tea and a ration of food which the Germans gave to us. I also took my dhobi stick and two empty tins which I had been using to make tea and coffee in.

After a time, a group of about ten Germans came with guns and told us to make formations of five in one row which we did. The highest ranked NCO there had a list of our names and POW numbers. When he called a person's number that person went to the other side and made the same formation of five in one row. When everyone had been called and counted once more and all was correct we marched to the station in the same formation. Each side of our columns the Germans were guarding us. They had come from a different place and were strangers to us. The Germans we knew on the camp were friendlier.

When we came to the station the goods train was already waiting for us. The Germans opened the door to the train and told us to get in. we climbed in one by one helping one another, at the same time the Germans were counting how many of us went in to the wagon. When the wagon was full they closed the sliding door. They repeated the same wagon after wagon until the last man went in and then they closed the final door. There were about forty to fifty men in each wagon. We all wanted to sit on the floor against the side of the wagon. Sitting in the middle was very uncomfortable and very tiring and there was not much room for stretching our legs or turning sideways. The windows were very small about one foot by two and a half feet and were very high close to the ceiling. If I wanted to see anything I had to climb up or stand on my friends back and if he wanted to see out he would do the same on mine.

The time came to go and the whistle was blown and the train started moving very slowly. I thought that the train must be very long. I got my place and leaned against the wooden side. Sitting near the wall I noticed a light through a chink in the boards but it was not big enough to see anything. During the journey I decided to cut a bigger hole. I had a knife with me and started cutting piece by piece to enlarge the hole. It took quite a long time because the board was about one and a half inches thick. When I finished cutting, my little window was four inches long and one inch wide. I had a good view during the journey and I could even see the full length of the train from where I was situated.

I was counting how many wagons our steam engine had to pull. On a big bend in the open countryside I noticed the first wagon behind the engine was a passenger carriage where the Germans were having a comfortable ride. While travelling the weather was very nice and warm even though our little window was open.

Each one of us was feeling more weary and tired. We had not had any drink or food since breakfast. We were travelling quite fast for a long time, after a while we noticed the train slowed down to walking pace, about five kilometres per hour and we wondered why? I looked through my hole and could see a big hill where the engine had hard work to do.

Suddenly I saw two of our fellows were running across the fields in the direction of some trees and bushes. Next thing the train suddenly stopped and we heard shouting and shooting. I saw three Germans running across the fields after them. We were all hoping that they would manage to escape to the woods. It was a long run from the trains and the trees. The Germans were shooting and shouting and chasing them all the time. The next thing I saw was our mates turn back with raised hands and walk towards the train. The Germans approached them

and started hitting them with their guns. One German had only a revolver he was the commander of the guards and he kept hitting them on the head with the revolver handle. The men kept falling on the ground and the Germans were hitting their backs. They never stopped hitting our men who were falling and running. They were covering their heads with their bare hands and the Germans were chasing them to the train.

We were helpless looking at them. Their bodies were covered in blood from their head to feet. They were hardly recognisable. Their friends in the wagon they were travelling in opened the doors ready for them. They were unable to climb up so their pals gave them a hand and dragged them in. one of them was bleeding very badly. We did not have anything to stop the flow from his head so we used shirts and towels. After a while he became unconscious and later on, during the journey, he died.

We arrived at Sagon for Stalag Luft III in the evening.

From Sagon station we marched to the camp. Stalag Luft III was a new camp and we were the first British POW'S to arrive there. It was a very large camp situated in the middle of a forest. It was surrounded by high pine trees and a double wire fence with watchtowers where guards with machine guns kept an eye on us. Otherwise we could only see the sky and the birds.

All the barracks were wooden and were built on two foot high pillars. Inside we had a separate kitchen with a flat cooker which burns coal or wood. In the middle of the barracks was a passage and on both sides were two rows of bunk beds three beds high. At the ends of both sides near the door we had a big stove with an iron chimney up to the ceiling. These two stoves supplied our heating in the winter.

One day, after roll call the Germans told us to clear all the roots from the trees which had been cut to build the camp for us. We had to dig and pull up hundreds of roots. Each morning about fifty of us, under the German guards were doing the digging and pulling. The Germans gave us a special tool to pull the roots. The tool looked like a see-saw and it was very easy to work with. We had to dig all different sizes of roots. We started clearing the place where our new football pitch would be. It was a normal size pitch and we managed to clear it quite quickly because the ground was very sandy and digging was easy. We levelled the ground next and the pitch was ready for use.

Everybody was happy to see the pitch. We had a lot of good players in the camp and they soon organised teams. Each barrack had their own team and they played against each other. We had a league like in England, with a first and second division. During the summer we played various games basketball, netball, and cricket but always the most popular was football.

All equipment and other thing we received from the England, Canada and America through the Red Cross. We were very well organised in the camp. We had different committees; sports, theatre and escape committees. And in the summer we also had sports days similar to the Olympic Games with a number of different sport competitions. During the winter we flooded our football pitch with water and made an ice rink where we played hockey or just skated for our own pleasure.

I mustn't forget that during this time we were still clearing and digging the roots daily, it took us a few months to finish the task.

Our committees were very busy especially the escape committee. They had to plan tunnels taking in great consideration the distance and place where to start digging and opening the tunnel. All preparation and work was secret, just a dozen men were in on the operation. Some were kept an eye on by Germans who were coming in and out of the camp gate. On each corner of the hut was a man who received signals from the gate when Germans were entering the camp. The signal was passed to another man, then up to the tunnel where one man would be digging. The digger would collect sand in socks and when he had finished his time he was given the signal to stop digging. Before he got out he would pass all of the socks full of sand to his mates. All the time men were watching the movements of the Germans in the camp and on the other side of the wire fence. All the sand was discharged in small amounts on the ground. They had a few different ways of spreading it around the field. Digging was a hard and sweaty job.

They were digging in the ditch in the toilets when the prisoners were still using them. The toilet was very primitive. Against the wall which was the full length of the toilet block was a big ditch. Along the middle of the ditch was a wooden perch where a man could crouch and balancing against the wall with his hand while using the toilet.

The cleverest tunnel I saw was in the open ground in the early summer. In one of the Red Cross parcels were different types of seeds. The seeds were shared between the men who liked gardening. The gardens were along the side of the huts and some were in spare open ground. Each person had a piece of land one foot wide by three foot long. Because I was in a group of six, we had a plot of land three foot wide by six foot long. I sowed various seeds, lettuce radish, carrots, onions and tomatoes. The ground was sandy and very easy to dig. The weather was very nice and the seeds were growing very fast, I would water them every day to make them grow quicker.

Back to my story of digging the tunnel which was very clever as it was out in the open ground. One of the escape committee decided to dig under the lettuce plants; they made a square wooden box two and a half feet square and five inches high. One day under cover they dug an opening in the ground the size of the wooden box frame which was already made and placed firmly around the hole. On top of the hole they put the soil filled tray in which they sowed some lettuce seeds. Everyday they watered and tended them but no one guessed what was going on underneath, only the man who was digging the tunnel.

Digging tunnels was not very successful for our boys as the Germans found all of them. They brought a fire engine in and would put the hose in the tunnel and with high pressure of water flooded it. They were searching often with dogs sending them under the huts where most work was going on. They also had a monitor in the office which could show them we were digging a tunnel somewhere. When they discovered a tunnel and arrived with the fire engine our fellows would jeer and laugh at them.

While I was at Stalag Luft III our theatrical committee received from the Red Cross sets of instruments for a symphony band and for a brass band. We even were sent a large piano.

After a while they formed a great orchestra. They practised in an empty hut and sometimes would give us concerts.

One day our committee asked the German commander of the camp for permission to build a real theatre with a stage inside a hut and this was granted. The Germans were very co-operative and gave us all the tools to do the work. Firstly, they built a stage with a sliding curtain. Next they dug a pit near the stage for the orchestra. The floor sloped up from the front of the stage to the end of the hut. In the middle of the theatre was a gangway and there were rows of chairs on both sides. We hired costumes for the shows from a Berlin theatre and for each article the Red Cross paid one German mark, a show sometimes could cost as much as two hundred and fifty marks.

We invited the commander officers with their wives and children to every show. At the front door of the theatre was a uniformed doorman who would show the German visitors to the reserved seats on the front row. It was a very posh presentation. It would start early evening and finish late in to the night. As usual the guards on the gate would count the guests when entering and leaving the camp.

One evening after the show all the Germans were counting at the gate once more and at the end of the count there was one visitor too many. What had happened was that a member of the escape committee had gone through the gate with the German officers. They had been planning the escape for quite a long time because all the required gear had to be made. ie: badges for the uniform, a buckle for the belt and other things had to be prepared such as maps and a pass.

We had got help from the some German guards, some were very friendly, for a packet of cigarettes or for a tin of coffee we could get most things. All the badges and buckles were made from silver paper which was inside each cigarette packet. Most people in the camp collected these silver leaves to help.

We had some very clever lads in the camp. One caste all decoration swastikas, badges etc. for each article a hundred or more silver leaves were needed for casting one little thing. For casting they used clay to make the mould and an iron spoon for melting the silver leaves. They melted them inside a stove on top of burning coals.

Life in the camp was quite easy, we received a supply of food regularly but sometimes we did not receive any parcels for a couple of weeks. Communications were then broken and things were delayed. Some of us were living together in small groups. I was in a group of six. Each one of us would be in charge for one week at a time. His job was to prepare all the meals for our group. In the morning, he would bring hot water from the main German kitchen for tea. He collected all the mugs and made the tea. After the tea, he would wash up the mugs as well. At dinner time each one of us got two or three potatoes from the main kitchen, which we gave to our duty man who cooked the dinner for us.

We shared the food we received from the Red Cross so if two people had a tin of spam we would put them together to make a meal for the six of us with maybe tinned beans. He would prepare these in our hut kitchen and we would then have fried potatoes with spam beans and butter. After the meals he washed up as well. When he was working the rest of us usually

played games of cards, poker, bridge, playing chess, reading, sunbathing if the weather was nice in the summer.

I usually played poker, we always played for cigarettes and sometimes we played in other huts where there were also other poker players. Other times they may come to our hut for a game. The betting was quite high and I remember a bet as high as a thousand cigarettes was placed one time. I carried my cigarettes in my kitbag. I had a lot of different brands of cigarettes. Some being fifty in a tin, I also had a lot of foreign cigarettes, American and other nationalities.

For my winnings I collected all different packets. I collected thousands of cigarettes, we could use them in the camp as money, we could buy food in the camp in exchange for cigarettes.

1 tin of sardines cost 10 cigarettes.

1 tin of spam cost 50 cigarettes.

1 tin of condensed milk cost 100 cigarettes.

A packet of tea would be 150 cigarettes.

So we made our life easier.

In the camp we also had a radio, they made a crystal radio. The reception was not very good so they decided to build a better one. They knew a good guard who would be willing to deal with them. For exchanging coffee, chocolate or cigarettes they got some radio parts and built a new one piece by piece. Eventually they finished it and from that time we got news from England everyday. It all had to be done very secretly. The news was written on a piece of paper and taken from hut to hut. The news was read out to us all so we knew how the war was progressing. The script was then destroyed.

Stalag Luft III was divided by a wooden fence. On our side of the fence they put a few rows of twelve-inch high barbed crisscross wire fencing close to the ground. It was a warning for us that we shouldn't put a foot over. If, when we played football, a ball went between the warning wire, we called to the guards on the watch tower for permission to get our ball.

On the other side of the fence were British and American officers.

I had been in the camp approximately one and a half years and in that time more and more officers were being imprisoned in the camp and it was being filled rapidly. To make room we were transferred to a different camp. The camp to which we were transferred was Stalag 1, Which was situated on a small island "Fehman" in the Baltic Sea.

This camp was much smaller than Stalag Luft III. We had a good commander at the camp and life was similar to the other camp.

I remember one day when we were celebrating the birthday of one of our friends, we were singing a song when the camp commander unexpectedly entered our hut and asked us what was going on. We told him that we were celebrating our friend's birthday. He said he would send a soldier over with a few bottles of German beer for the occasion. Unfortunately, we were only in the camp a short while, a couple of months.

After those few months we were moved to another camp Stalag IV. When I arrived there I had a big surprise. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw what a huge camp it was. It looked

like four camps joined together and only separated by a high barbed wire fence. In this camp there were many nationalities: French, Russian, Polish, British, Czechs and later, Italians arrived.

Life in this camp was completely different to our life in previous camps. There was a lot of discipline and everybody was afraid. I heard a lot of different stories from other prisoners. In the camp we had two big kitchens and men were working in them in two shifts day and night, as there were ten to fifteen thousand prisoners to feed. The food ration was now very poor. Luckily, the prisoners from England did not totally depend on the German food because we were still receiving parcels from the Red Cross.

We gave some of the food we received from the Germans to the Russians as they were treated very badly. At dinner time they would stand on the other side of the fence waiting for us to throw the food over to them. When we handed the food over the fence, about fifty Russians would rush and push forward to get close to the fence for the chance to get some food. One man was weaker than the others and got thrown to the floor and was nearly trampled to death. Another was pushed and pinned to the barbed wire where he almost choked to death. In the end, we decided it was better not to encourage them to us as it could do more harm than good. We felt so sorry for the poor Russians.

One day, we had potatoes delivered to the kitchen yard which was also fenced with barbed wire. The next day we saw a Russian lying down by the heap of potatoes. Other Russians were still wondering around the camp looking for food, searching every dustbin and heaps of rubbish. Some were dying of starvation everyday. I was lucky as I was even able to send some German money and parcels home to Poland from that camp. With chocolate and cigarettes I made a deal with a German to send my parcels to Poland. When I appeared at the main gate office with my parcel he knew what it was all about. He would take it, stamp it, with a swastika stamp and I then gave him a packet of cigarettes and a bar of chocolate. My mother received the money and parcels, which was good as when I sent them I thought the chances of her getting them to be fifty-fifty. My friend had told me that when my parcel was stamped with the swastika stamp I could almost be sure that my mother would get them.

I do not remember exactly how long we stayed at that camp. I don't think it was too long before the Germans decided to move us once more. This time we moved by an ordinary goods train to Riga the capital of Latvia which lies on the Baltic Sea. We arrived at Stalag VI, quite a new camp situated a few kilometres from the town of Mitau.

We had a problem when we moved from different camps, our food parcels were always delayed by a few weeks. Once we were organised in the camps, our food parcels would begin to arrive regularly and we had plenty of stock in our stores.

Suddenly, we had news that we were leaving that camp because the Russians were advancing and the German army was retreating. We began to wonder if perhaps we would be returning to Germany. They divided us into two groups of approximately five hundred men. One group was to travel by train and one by sea. I was in the group which were going by boat. After about a week, they called rolecall and told us we were leaving. They gave us a food parcel each, for the journey and we were asked if we wanted some new shoes or clothing or we

could have an extra food parcel. Our stores at the camp were huge with food, clothing, shoes, and blankets. We hated the idea of not taking it and leaving it behind for the Germans.

When we got to the Port of Riga there was a boat waiting for us on the quayside. It was an ordinary cargo boat. When we were on deck a German opened the hatch door and told us to go down. When my turn came it was very scary climbing down. First, I put my feet down on the first rung of the ladder which was fixed permanently from the top to the bottom of the boat. I stepped onto the bottom of the boat and looked around to see where to sit and put my kit bag. There were no benches or chairs not even something to hold on to. Everybody just sat on the floor or lay down at the side of the boat.

We travelled approximately five hundred miles. When we had been at sea for four days and nights, we arrived at the small port of Swinemune which lies between two small islands in the estuary of the River Oder. From the islands we walked to the town of Stettin which was a few kilometres from Swinemune.

We arrived at the goods station where a goods train was ready waiting for us. We entered the wagons. In each wagon there were about twenty to thirty prisoners locked in one half of the wagon and the other half was occupied by two guards facing us and keeping an eye on us. Some of the prisoners were chained two together. I was very lucky; I was free and not chained to another prisoner. We waited quite a long time on the train and during that time we heard American bomber planes over Stettin and heard the bombs drop. It was horrific. I felt our wagon shaking and jumping up and down. We were nearly shaken off the tracks.

The German guards were so frightened that they left us inside the wagon and went to hide under the wagon for their own protection. As we heard the planes flying over Stettin we all cheered and started to sing. When the bombing stopped and the American planes had passed over in the direction of home the quietness came back as usual. Our guards opened the wagon doors and told us that we would be moving shortly. After a while we heard shouts! There were Germans checking each wagon to see if they were OK in preparation for the departure. We heard a whistle, our wagon jerked a couple of times and we were once again on our way to a different camp.

We had been travelling a few hours when we stopped at a small station in a small village. We got out of the wagons. They took us to the side of the road and put us in formations of rows of five and counted us. After about an hour, new guards came and changed over with our old guards. The new ones were younger than the previous ones and were stricter with us. No more laughs and jokes with them like we had with the older ones.

They kept us standing in formation for another two hours, it was nearly midday and very hot, the temperature was about 25 degrees centigrade. We couldn't sit and we had nothing to eat or drink. We were sweating and getting more tired and restless. We had been wondering why we were waiting for so long. Time passed and we saw German guards marching towards us with guns with bayonets on them, they surrounded our columns, and told us to get moving "Loos, loos!" and showed us the direction.

We walked slowly, ignoring the guards shouts of "loos loos" which meant quicker, quicker. We still ignored them thinking nothing was going to happen. Once we entered the forest things



were different, the guards started pushing us with their guns to make us go quicker. Later on, they started hitting our heads, backs and shoulders very hard. They even started using their bayonets and a friend of mine was stabbed about fifteen times on his back and bottom. We had a problem running, because two thirds of us were chained together in twos. I was lucky I was free and could run more easily to avoid being hit by the Germans.

The forest road was very sandy, our feet were sinking in and running fast was really impossible. On top of this each one of us were carrying our possessions on our backs and in our hands. I had my kitbag firmly strapped to my back and I had a small parcel in my hand. Running with a heavy kitbag was very uncomfortable. We were covered with dust, it looked as if a big cloud was over our heads. It wasn't possible to breathe properly as we were choking with the dust, we couldn't even see what was happening at the front or at the back of our column.

Some fellows couldn't run and fell on the floor with exhaustion. After about two kilometres I couldn't carry my kitbag any longer and I tried to take it off my back. But it was a very hard job to undo the strap. I tried to slide it down off my arms still no success, so I took a knife from my pocket cut the strap and threw my bag on the floor, "thank goodness".

During the run ninety percent of our friends left their property on the floor.

The longer we ran the more difficult it became, because our bags, parcels and kitbags were lying all over the road. I was jumping over them trying to avoid them. Many were open and torn with their contents scattered everywhere. There were personal things on the floor, photographs of families, mother fathers, pictures and letters from home and from friends in England. I lost everything, all my equipment which I had been using all the time like knives, forks all types of tins for cooking and boiling water. On top of that I lost my blanket a few hundred cigarettes and a few tins of food. But I mostly regretted losing my little pillow which my mum had given me when I was in the Polish Air Force in 1935.

I had this little pillow with me all the time when I arrived in England, I had a good nights sleep on it. Then I was shot down and captured by the Germans. After a few months of being a prisoner I received a parcel from my friend in England and inside it was my little pillow, it was really a big surprise and now my pillow got left with my luggage on the dusty road.

I noticed on both sides of the road were German soldiers with machine guns in their hands standing behind the bushes. That was why they had been beating and hitting us to provoke us into revolting and giving them a chance to shoot us. It was revenge, because on the same day German Generals made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler. The explosive in the briefcase was planted near the side of Hitler's chair. Unfortunately when Hitler entered the room the bomb went off. Hitler was fortunate that he wasn't killed only slightly injured and shaken. That was why we were beaten and made to run all the time.

Suddenly, we saw on the horizon in front of us an open field and blue sky. We then stopped in front of Stalag Luft V.

All of us were exhausted and covered with dust and sweat. It was hard to recognise each other. On the field they told us to make a column in rows of five. We were standing and

waiting for our friends a very long time, because some were very weak and couldn't run or walk. They were carried by mates and some we just gave support to help them walk.

After a time the Germans finished counting us and we were ready to enter the camp. One of the duty guards opened the gate and our guard told the first row of five to march in. The first five men started walking and again the Germans started shouting "Loos, loos" and at the same time hitting and pushing them with their guns. Each row had the same treatment of hitting and pushing. We looked like sheep running through the gate and we were counted once more.

Once inside the camp we were behind a barbed wire fence, feeling very tired exhausted and very thirsty as we hadn't had anything to drink since early morning. They kept us in the open field. We were sitting or lying down to get some rest after the weary day. Luckily, the weather was very nice and very hot. After about an hour they took us through another gate to the main camp. There were rows and rows of small houses similar to sheds where we were accommodated ten men to a hut.

Inside there were ten straw mattresses lying on the floor on one side of the hut. We did not have any room at all we just managed to get to our mattress to sit on or lie on. The passage was only two feet wide from the mattress to the side wall. There was a small window four feet long and two feet wide and one small door. It was impossible to have any furniture like a chair or a table in there. Living in these small huts was very awkward; we could not put any personal things anywhere. We kept all our property on the bed behind our heads during the night when we slept. I was lucky and unlucky because I had dropped all my property on the road during the run. I only had my mattress for myself.

We didn't stop very long in that camp about four weeks. The camp was surrounded by very high trees so we could only see the blue sky and at night the moon and stars. It was a very quiet life, very different from the other camps where there had been a lot of activity. Like digging tunnels, making all necessary things ready for escaping, watching every movement of the Germans inside the camp and on the other side of the fence. We also had played football and other games.

The first week in the camp we had very nice and very hot weather. Suddenly one day the sky was covered with black clouds, a short time later a storm came and the rain was pouring. We were happy to see the rain pouring down. A lot of us stripped off our clothes and we had good fun running around or kicking the ball. During the storm there was lightning and we heard a lot of thunder.

Suddenly I saw a flash and in a split second it hit the ground between the huts. A few moments after the shock we all ran to the hut where we thought the lightning had struck. When we entered the hut we saw one of our friends was lying dead on the doorstep. I looked inside the hut, but couldn't believe my eyes my friends were laying still on their mattresses I thought they were all dead as they were not moving.

When we went in to the hut we started trying to revive them, we found that they were all paralysed. Members of the German medical staff came later and covered them with blankets to try and keep them warm and at the same time they massaged them. During this treatment some of our friends came round quickly but some were taken away to the medical centre

where they were kept for a couple of days to recover completely. The lightning which had hit the ground had gone right through a small open window of the hut and had come out through the door where one of our friends had been sitting reading a book. Unfortunately, the lightning hit him and killed him instantly. He was buried in the forest outside the camp.

A few days later we saw a German electrocuted on the top of an electric pole where he was doing his job. He was hanging on one side of the pole and the Germans had great difficulty taking him down. It took them a very long time. It was an unlucky week for us and for the Germans as well, two men dying unexpectedly.

We did not stay long in that camp. The Russians were advancing and we had to leave again. One morning the Germans called us on parade and told us we were to prepare ourselves for marching in about one hour's time. I packed all my equipment and possessions as usual and half an hour later they called us once more. We made a formation of rows of five to make it easier to be counted. When we left the camp there were about ten guards waiting on the other side of the gate. They were going to be marching with us and keeping an eye on us. They had a big agricultural cart pulled by two oxen with them. On the cart they had everything, like rucksacks, blankets, coats, guns, buckets, shovels and hay and straw for the oxen to eat.

We walked everyday from early morning to darkness. All the time we were on country roads avoiding all main roads and towns. We marched through villages and sometimes we stopped in them for the night. Every night we slept in a different place. When we stopped in a village we were very lucky because a lot of Polish people were living and working in them. They would come out of their homes cheering, greeting and waving to us at the same time we exchanged a few words telling them we wanted to buy some bread and other things to eat. The Germans tried to stop us talking to them but we still managed to say what we wanted.

The marching was not too bad we followed the cart which was pulled by the two oxen and that was our speed of travel. When we stopped for the night the first thing we did was to find some where suitable for a good nights sleep. We slept mostly in barns. When we found a barn and I had selected a space for the night, the next thing I wanted was to have a good wash. Especially my feet I wanted to keep them in good shape. During our journey I saw some fellows having problems with their feet, they could not walk properly. Occasionally the Germans would let them go on the cart to have a rest so the oxen would do their walking for them. But a few hours later they had to go back to the road again.

I had a wash outside in the farmyard under an ordinary water pump. I took my clothes off, with one hand I pumped and with the other I washed my feet and all my body. I would have a wash without any hesitation in any kind of weather, cold wind rain or snow. I always had a good wash as always felt so fresh afterwards.

Later on I went to find some food. I walked looking around the farmyard, to find some eggs or catch a chicken for supper. I couldn't go out of the farmyard as the Germans were keeping watch over us. The Poles I had seen on the way in the villages, had arrived after us and were waiting and waiting on the other side of the fence. They were calling us; they knew we wanted to do business with them. They wanted cigarettes and I wanted some bread. I exchanged my cigarettes for four loaves of bread. It was a satisfactory exchange for all. It was

easiest to exchange with young boys and girls, because the Germans would turn a blind eye to the youngsters.

On one occasion I made an agreement with some young girls, they didn't have any bread to swap so they suggested that they go and make potato cakes and in a couple of hours they would be ready. My two friends and I shared our food and were very excited to be having fresh hot potato cakes. The two girls came back as promised and stood close to the fence. I had been waiting and looking for over an hour. I did not want to be late and lose my potato cakes to someone else. When I saw the two girls coming in the distance and carrying a parcel with them I nearly jumped to the sky. When they passed the parcel; to me they told me that there were twenty cakes so I gave them fifty cigarettes. They were very pleased and thanked me very much. Cigarettes for them were more valuable than German money. When I carried the cakes I could feel them warm in my hands. They were wrapped in some kind of material like a tea towel. When I took them and showed them to my mates, their eyes lit up and they told me I was 'Crafty-blue-eyes'. We enjoyed the cakes very much. We ate some and the rest we saved for the next couple of days, because we didn't have such luck every day and we were short of food all the time.

I remember one evening when we came through the village as usual, the Poles were greeting us, but when we stopped the Germans locked us inside the barn and we were not allowed to get out. What we did was to wait until darkness, thinking how we could get out of the barn. We managed to loosen a couple of wooden boards; just enough for us to squeeze through the hole and a few of us went out.

Before we left each of us took something to exchange. I took my woollen sweater. We crawled through the hole very carefully looking to see where the Germans were. When we got out we jumped over the fence to the field and went in the direction of the Poles houses they were about one mile from the barn. During the walking, running and jumping over ditches and trenches, I lost my woollen sweater which I kept under my jacket near my stomach. When we got closer to the houses we tried to guess which houses the Poles were living in. We walked on our toes very quietly. When we were near the windows where there were lights inside we tried to listen to any conversation we could hear to find out which language they were speaking. Was it Polish or German? When we heard the Polish language we knocked on the door and when the door opened we saw smiling faces and they invited us in without hesitation.

During our conversation we asked them if they had some kind of food. We found out that they had nothing for us and nothing for themselves either. They still offered us what they had. Just some dried old peas and they told us they would cook them, but it would take two hours. We had a conversation between ourselves, and we decided we would wait. They brought a small sack of dried peas about two kilos, which they put in a pan for boiling. We waited patiently and we were joking and laughing with them at the same time.

When the peas were ready we realised that we had nothing to put them in for going back to the barn. We had been unlucky we had gone to poor people they didn't have anything for us to carry the hot peas in. We couldn't put them in our pockets as it would be to uncomfortable jumping over fences ditches and we would arrive back with them all mashed. I made a decision. I took off my sock and told them to pour the pea's in. all my friends started laughing

at what I was doing and taking the mickey of me. After a while they changed their minds and did the same as I had done laughing and saying the peas would get more flavour and become tasty.

When we shared the peas between us we thanked them for their good heart because they had given us what little they had. We gave them some cigarettes which they were happy to have in exchange. We left their home and walked in the direction of the barn very cautiously hoping nobody would see us. We got close to the fence of the barn and looked to see if there were any German guards around. After a couple of minutes we decided to go over the fence one man at a time and quietly ran through the farmyard and quickly sneaked into the barn. Four of us were lucky and got through the hole safely.

When I got to the barn, I noticed it was very quiet and everybody was sleeping very peacefully. What a problem, the inside of the barn was very dark and I had to find my place next to my friends. I could only guess the approximate direction for me to crawl to my bed. It was very difficult moving between people lying everywhere on the straw covered floor. Before I put my foot down I was feeling where they were sleeping, sometimes poking their faces or eyes by mistake. Before the four of us reached our beds we had nearly woken everyone up in the barn. They were all very angry, shouting and swearing at us, I took this opportunity to call my friend. He heard my voice and this gave me the direction I had to go in to my bed, which I found after a struggle. I sat beside him and told him how we had got there and come back. We then ate a handful of warm cooked peas.

I didn't have much sleep that night only about two hours. As usual the early morning guard called us all on to parade. It took quite a while before everybody's name was called out, we then stood in rows of five to be counted and be ready for another weary day of walking.

That evening we came to a nice big farm where chickens were still running in the yard and cows were inside the stable. My friends went to find a suitable place for that's nights sleep. I went to search around the yard and stables and found a dozen cows eating straw. I lost no time in running to the barn to find my friends to tell them the news... I was going to milk some cows. I took a big can which we used for boiling water for our tea.

I had never experienced milking a cow before. When I went inside the stable the cows were standing very quiet and were chewing the straw. I approached them very carefully as I did not know how they would react. I walked slowly to one of them and stroked the side of her stomach. When I saw that she was very calm and still eating. I went out side to see if there was anyone there. It was all clear so I went back quickly to the stable, put my can on the floor and tried starting milking. I squeezed her nipples hard and pulled down but the milk spurted out on to the floor instead of into the can. I tried very hard to get the milk in my can thinking how to do it. I looked towards the door and saw a stool nearby. I quickly picked it up and placed it under the cow and put my can on to it. It made getting the milk in the can much easier that way. When the can was half full I first tasted it and then drank some of it, I found it to be warm and very nice.

I hadn't tasted real milk for four years.

After a while I finished milking, gave her a stroke and thanked her. I put the stool back where I had got it from and went out of the stable cautiously. When I was sure the coast was clear I went back to show my friends the full can of milk. Their faces and eyes lit up and started singing "for Gen's a jolly good fellow".

Each day was different for us. Day after day, week after week, but I can only write about the most dangerous and exciting episodes of my life. One evening we reached a small village and again we occupied a small barn where there were a lot of farming tools. There was a loft where the farmer kept his hay and straw. Some of us occupied the floor section where there was plenty of space between the machinery. I with my friends went up into the loft which was a lovely place to sleep.

We weren't alone there were a lot of other fellows too. It was quite high about four metres with a long ladder perched at the side of the door opening. After a night sleep it was my turn to bring the boiling water for tea. As usual I took three cans with me. Looking down through the door hole I could see men lying down the side of the gangway. Wondering how to get down with the cans in my hands, I turned my back to the hole and slowly lowered my foot down to the ladder. I immediately lost my footing and balance and fell down backwards. During the fall I did a somersault and landed on my feet. How I did it I do not know because it happened so suddenly. I just know I was very lucky that I didn't break my neck or leg, because there was a lot of iron lying near the wall where I fell.

Anyway, when I landed I was facing in the direction of the door still holding the cans in my hands. At first I was in shock but after a while I went out as though nothing had happened to me. When I got the boiling water for our tea and returned, I told my mates my story of what had happened they couldn't believe I was still alive.

After our very poor breakfast we went again for the same routine and carried on marching. We had been on the move for quite a long time during the past two weeks when we came to a large camp where there were prisoners of many nationalities.

The camp had many different types of huts and buildings as well as the tents where we were accommodated.

There was no beds, no mattresses not even any straw so we slept on the bare ground. There was a very primitive single fence around the camp with a watch tower on each of the corners. It could not be compared with Stalag Luft III, or in fact any other of the camps where I had spent my time.

We had a kitchen where they cooked meals and boiled water for our tea. There was no discipline because the Germans were losing the war and were more flexible. We knew and the Germans knew that any day the British or American tanks would liberate us. Some prisoners climbed over the fence or cut a hole to get out. Far away from the camp we could hear the echo of heavy guns from time to time. Some of our fellows made friends with the German guards and made deals with them. They exchanged tins of coffee and cigarettes for cameras. One of my friends had a camera and took pictures inside and outside the camp. He took some pictures of me alone and with some friends. One picture was taken near the fire together with my mates cooking our meals. I have a lot of photographs from this camp in my album more than a dozen. I bought them from my friend when we returned to England.

When the Germans in the camp felt that our forces were advancing and not far away they decided to leave, most of the high ranking Germans left. Before they left the camp they made arrangements with the British Officials who were prisoners to double the guards it meant one German and one British prisoner would keep control inside and outside the camp. They also bought five horses for us for food. The horses were kept outside the camp on a small patch of grass. We did not kill any of them because we knew we would soon be liberated.

Across the road which led to the village was a very large building four stories high and very long. We did not know what was inside. Each day more and more men would go out of the camp and have a wander around. One day a few men broke in to the building. We next saw them coming out carrying things in their hands. I was curious so I went inside.

The size gave me a shock: it was massive. As I walked from section to section, I could not believe what I was seeing. There was everything from the smallest thing like a needle to a grand piano. I looked around but did not know what to take. There were all different electric things, furniture, pictures etc. If I took something large I would have no where to keep or hide it. I decided to take just a couple of souvenirs, three wallets and four smoking pipes for my friends. When I came out of the building I saw prisoners of different nationalities were carrying sacks of flour, peas, beans, sugar and other goods to consume.

In the evening I noticed smoke was pouring from the large storage building, later the flames were like volcanoes, red hot lava flew and reached in to the sky. Nobody tried to put them out. The fire lasted a couple of days then smoked for over a week, eventually leaving a skeleton of twisted metal and ashes.

A few days later we heard constant sounds of machine guns and heavy guns. It was a sign that our tanks were not far away. A second hint was seeing a lot of single German soldiers running through the forest between the trees.

It was not long, the next morning British tanks stopped outside our camp. It was a beautiful hot day nobody could imagine the joy the prisoners felt. We climbed on the tanks jumping, cheering and laughing with happiness. The crews of the tanks gave us some biscuits and some tins of food. The following day they put up their tents and work began.

They called us one by one and took our name, profession, rank and other particulars and told us that soon we would be transported from that camp. A few days later a transport convoy of lorries arrived and we were taken to an unknown destination. While travelling I saw at the side of the road stacks of hundreds of cans of petrol oil and water, there were boxes of ammunition.

We had been going quite a long time when we arrived at an aerodrome where there were British planes. They told us to get down from the lorries and we were then marched to our transport plane. It was a Dakota. We took our seats on the benches or on the floor. When the doors were locked and secure we flew off leaving Germany, heading in the direction of England. During the flight we all sang and cheered. The journey took a few hours and when we landed it was at an aerodrome near Oxford.

From that time on, I started my second spell of freedom. From the plane I went to the dining room where we had a good English meal, when we had finished we went to the medical centre to be examined by a few doctors. At the base, the main air force medical centre, reminded me of when I first came from France to England and landed in Oxford and had my first medical examination.

After the medical we went to the barracks where we changed our clothing. We were given all new equipment, uniform shirts, socks, shoes vests and toiletries. The next day after a good nights rest we had breakfast and into the interrogation room where I was asked a few questions. Which station I had flown from and how long had been in Germany etc. when I had finished answering all their questions they gave me a train ticket to Dunholme Lodge.

The next day I packed my things and took the train to Dunholme Lodge which was a permanent Polish Air Force station. When I arrived, there were a lot of my friends. I went to the office where I notified them of my arrival. There, as usual, they took my particulars and at the same time they registered me and allocated my accommodation. One man on duty showed me where my barracks were and my bed and locker. I dropped my things on to the bed and went to the sergeant's mess. As I got closer to the building I could hear laughing and voices, I thought it must be a drinking party. When I opened the doors, the smoke nearly knocked me down. Walking to the bar to buy a drink I saw the lads were drinking smoking and some were playing games of poker or bridge. I met a few friends who I had last seen in Poland. We had a good drink and chat. The time came for the bar to close and we went back to our quarters.

After a night sleep on a soft mattress and clean sheets I felt more fresh and clean. We had breakfast of egg, bacon, a slice of toast and a cup of tea. It felt wonderful not having to worry about food as we had in the German camps. I went to the office next to find out about my money and my personal things which I had left in my room in the sergeant's mess on the night I went to operations to Germany but never returned. They told me all my things had been labelled and taken to the main store in Blackpool.

I knew my money was in the Lloyds Bank, because I had received a form from England to sign where I wanted my money to be deposited or sent to my next of kin. I signed for Lloyds bank.

A couple of days later all the ex-prisoners of war were called to the office. When we got there they told us we were going to get eight weeks paid leave. It was a nice surprise. I took my leave card, money and didn't waste any time, I went to my barracks opened my locker and took what I needed with me for my leave.

The first thing I wanted to do was go to Blackpool. I was there before when I first came from France and had stayed there a few weeks. I knew a few friends were there and I wanted to see them. At the same time I could collect my suitcase from the store. I went to Blackpool with a few of my friends, because Blackpool was the first Polish nest in England. Most of the Polish Airmen started their life in the Royal Air Force in Blackpool. This was where we received all our equipment to be airmen. Blackpool was and is still a lovely town.

When I first came to Blackpool I noticed a long promenade and a nice soft sandy beach with crystal blue water. Blackpool has two big ballrooms one in the Winter Garden and one in the



Tower. In addition there are three nice long piers, theatres and a lot of different types of amusements.

Walking from the station in the direction of my previous hotel, I realised that the town hadn't changed much during the four years of the war, still the same fresh air and blue sky. When I came to my hotel, approaching the four steps to the front door seemed like a dream to me that I was back again. I went inside and met the owners I told him I had been billeted there four years earlier. He shook my hand and said he was pleased to see me again and what a lucky man I was to still be alive. Talking and walking up the stairs he showed me my room and said he would see me in the dining room.

I put my small bag on the bed, took my gear out and had a good wash and shave. After about half an hour later I went down to the dining room and sat looking through the window in the direction of the sea. A few minutes later he brought a special snack for me, put it on the table and sat opposite me and we had a good chat. When I had finished my food I told him was going to collect my suitcase from the store.

I came to the building where my suitcase was, it was on the second floor. I opened the door and couldn't believe my eyes. There was big room with suitcases, bags and boxes lying everywhere. Some cases were opened and the contents were scattered all over the floor. I started pulling some cases down to separate them to see them better and to try and find out where mine was. Some cases were stacked in the corners against the walls, three rows deep and quite high. After a time I found my case and dragged it from underneath the pile, it was hard work. Nobody was in charge of the property; anyone could've come and taken mine or anybody else's case if they had wished.

Anyway, I took my case and went back to the hotel. On the way I met two of my mates. The last time I had seen them was when we had been serving at the same air force station, they were in a fighter squadron and I was in the bomber. They were very surprised to see me and told me the war was finished for them. They told me their story, how busy they had been in the air battling against the German fighters and bombers. They had their successes shooting down a few German planes too! I told my little story all the happenings and how I had survived.

On the way to my hotel we went to a restaurant for a meal. I had roasted chicken and chips they had something different, I do not remember what.

With the dinner we had a couple of pints of beer each. Naturally, when we finished our meals I paid the bill as I knew they had no money. When they had received their wages it had only lasted a few days as it went on drinking, dogs, and cards.

I remembered how before I was shot down, some fellows would take their wage packet and catch the first bus to Lincoln or Nottingham where they would spend all their money. The next day they would want to borrow a few bob for cigarettes. When we came out from the restaurant one of them quietly asked if I could lend him some money, he needed it very badly. I couldn't say no because they knew that all of us who returned from Germany had plenty of money. I lent it to him, but I never got it back, I never asked him to return it, as I knew he was always broke.

When we came to the road with the Manchester Hotel on the corner I had to cross the road to my billet. I said to them "Cheerio see you some time". They replied "Ta Ta. All the best and thanks for the meal and drinks." I went to my hotel put my case on the bed and opened it. I found all my private things were there items like, shirts, socks, pants ,shoes, my logbook, some pictures with my friends on the beach in Blackpool and other things. I didn't stay long in Blackpool as I had some business to done. I wanted to go to London to Lloyds bank to sort out my money and at the same time to draw some cash out.

When I returned after being prisoner to my permanent station at Dunholme Lodge, I was pleased and happy to see my friends with whom I had spent four years in German camps with. Dunholme Lodge was a small village a couple of miles from our station. The nearest place for us to buy drinks was the small town of Newark, the next nearest large town was Lincoln about 15 miles away. Another place we would go to spend our money was Nottingham. Before the war everyone knew the saying that Nottingham had the prettiest girls in the whole of England.

Newark had sad memories for us. During the war we had buried quite a lot of our friends in Newark cemetery. They died from all different causes, road accidents, a crash of planes into the ground and even suicide. The saddest time I had was when squadron 106 from the neighbouring Swinderby Aerodrome went on operation one night in 1941 the target being Berlin, they had reserve tanks of petrol for petrol mounted on their plans and that night they took off from another place closer to the coast to save fuel. After the operation when they were returning to base, the weather had changed from good to very bad. Fog covered all the coast of Lincolnshire. The visibility was zero. So they were flying around over the base and waiting for the ground crew to light up the drums of oil along the landing strip. Even that didn't help them, they couldn't see the ground lights, their fuel was very low almost nil. They got the order to jump out and ditch the planes in the sea. The answer was negative, they didn't have enough fuel to reach the coast, so they decided to land at the base. One by one they crash landed all over the aerodrome. That night the squadron lost twenty men. Each plane had casualties, some had heavy injuries, some minor injuries and some lost their lives.

The Polish General W. Sikorski was buried in the same cemetery. He was the head of the Polish Air Forces and brought the Polish army from Russia to England to fight alongside the British. General Sikorski was at the meeting in Lisbon with the British in Portugal. He was returning to England by plane with a Czech captain landed in the sea. The crew all survived but all the passengers were drowned including General Sikorski. Why he didn't have a Polish crew nobody knows. After the war there were a lot of questions and discussions about what had happened. It was not quite clear to the Polish forces in Britain why all the crew survived and all the passengers were drowned. There has even been television programmes about the death of the General Sikorski. In 1994 he was moved from Newark cemetery back to Poland. It was at the request of the Polish President Lech Walesa, who fought for independent Poland and freedom from Russian occupation.

During my six weeks leave I spent a lot of time sorting out my affairs. I went to Sheffield to order a suit and to Nottingham to order an Air Force uniform from the best material. When I ordered the suit I needed 24 clothing coupons which I bought on the black market. I paid two shillings and sixpence for each coupon. One shilling was twelve pence and there was twenty shilling to one pound.

I had a lot of problems with my money which was in Lloyds bank in London. When I was short of money the nearest Lloyds bank was in Lincoln about three miles away from my camp at Dunholme Lodge. Every time I went to draw some money from the Lincoln branch the desk wanted to know if I had some money in the bank so had to ring London to check. It made me mad and angry. I was wasting my time waiting for hours for a reply from London. The line was always engaged. When finally he did get through, they would check and I would receive my money. The other annoying thing was he would deduct the cost of the phone call from the money he gave me. Sometimes I would have to pay eight to ten shillings a one time which was a lot of money then. In the end I lost my patience and went to London withdrew all my money and put it in to a post office account. The post office was more convenient for me because there was one in every town and village. I could withdraw money out without any questions. I could only draw ten pounds daily but that was quite sufficient for me.

When I was in Sheffield to order my suit the tailor who took my measurements asked for twenty four coupons and a deposit. I gave him the coupons and a five pound deposit. When I asked him when it would be ready I couldn't believe it when he told me it would be in four weeks time. It was too late to change my mind and cancel the order because I had given him the deposit which was a lot of money. Anyway it was my own fault I should only have given him a small deposit.

After four weeks I went to Sheffield for the fitting. When I got to the shop and asked him how my suit was he said he had to go to the next room to find out. Five minutes later he came back and said he was very sorry but my suit hadn't arrived in from Birmingham and told me it would be ready a week later. I told him that it cost me money and time travelling from Lincoln to Sheffield for nothing. When I went a week later my trousers were there, when I tried them on they were tight round my waist and legs as well. "What about my jacket?" I asked him. He told me it hadn't arrived from Manchester. he told me that he only sold material and took orders in his shop then he sent them to different places to be made up, jackets to Manchester and trousers to Birmingham.

I had a lot of trouble with that shop I was travelling like a yo-yo up and down. To save my money I decided that when I went for the next fitting I would take my suit with me. I knew from the second suiting I would never get satisfaction from the shop with the shopkeepers attitude. In the end I took my suit and asked him for a piece of material to widen my trousers, and that was that, thank goodness.

Life in camp was very easy we had no work to do and nobody troubled us. In the morning after breakfast everyone went their own way. Some went back to the sergeants mess and spent time playing cards poker or bridge, some played chess. One fellow bought an old car and spent everyday repairing and painting it. The car was his hobby and he just loved to get his hands dirty, smeared with grease and oil. Some lads, including myself, did leather work and made handbags for ladies and leather shoes with high wedges.

I also spent time playing cards, I liked poker, and sometimes the stakes were high. Sometimes we played all day and night and didn't have time go out for breakfast. Our good friends always brought breakfast for us, a couple of kippers, two slices of bread and a good cup of tea. During the game the player who had had enough and had usually lost a lot of money walked away from the table, there were always volunteers to take his place in the game. Sometimes I

won nearly a hundred pounds and sometimes, I lost. However over the whole game I was only a few pounds up or down.

One day my friend and I decided to go to Blackpool again for a few days before our eight week leave was finished. Blackpool was like a magnet for Poles, like a beehive for bees. We liked Blackpool very much, the people were very friendly. There was a sandy beach with a very long promenade, three piers. There were plenty of entertainment, restaurants, pubs, lots of amusements, cinemas, a circus, dancing halls, a very big fairground and the Blackpool Tower.

One evening I was stood talking to two friends outside the Manchester Hotel when we noticed an attractive young lady who was looking puzzled. One of my friends asked if he could help. She replied that she was going to the dance in the Tower Ballroom and was not sure where to get the tram. I told her that I would show her and if she wished I would take her. However, I did suggest that we go to the Winter Garden ballroom instead as it was the one that I preferred.

We went back to the boarding house where she, her aunt and two children were staying, to tell her aunt that there was a change of plan if she wanted to follow on later. The young ladies name was Kay and she lived in Essex. We were together everyday that week and we would spend a lot of time on the pleasure beach. We went on every amusement, like the big wheel, the big dipper, and lots of other rides. We went to the circus and the cinema; we had a very good time together.

On the last day of our holiday we made arrangements to meet each other one day in London. Kay went home to Essex. I stayed a couple of days longer.

When I returned to Dunholme Lodge nothing had changed it was back to the same old faces. I was in that camp for quite a long time, but they didn't have any work for us to do. The commander of the camp didn't really know what to do with us, so they started sending us to different camps. I was the only one posted to Oxford, I was just there a couple of weeks but still there were no jobs for me to do. They had made a mistake sending me there and so I was returned to my own unit at Dunholme Lodge.

Later, I went a second time with my friends to a different camp Henlow. There we would lie sunbathing behind the barracks. We had a free hand and could do whatever we wanted. Some men had their hobbies, I mad two more leather handbags for Kay. We didn't stay there long and again back to our unit.

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## **Epilogue**

Dad's book was never finished as he became too ill with cancer to continue.

He married Kay, eighteen months later and went to live in Essex. They had two daughters Krystyna and Janice who also married and gave him three grand children. Stefan, Joanne and Kathryn.

He loved his family, car, garden, allotment and his shed!

To friends and family he was a true gentleman, generous and kind.

Because he never elaborated on his past we got him to write his memories down so we would have them to treasure.

This is our family history.