

FROM BARTH TO TIBENHAM

May 6, 1945 to May 9, 1945

Before dawn on May 6, 1945, three roommates from Block 8, North II Compound, Stalag Luft 1, Barth, Germany, slipped out of the compound, heading west. Stalag Luft 1 was on a peninsula and the first objective was to get to the other side of the body of water. A small boat was located, which was boarded without question of seaworthiness. Before the opposite shore was reached, the boat sank and the three were able to wade ashore. Soon after, they were stopped by a Russian sentry. What was, undoubtedly, the most dangerous part of the journey was resolved by a conversation between the sentry and one of the three who could speak Russian. A few packs of cigarettes were given to the sentry and the three were allowed to proceed without further delay.

Their feet wet from wading ashore, and without any dry socks or shoes, the three proceeded on toward Rostock. Along the way, they were fed lunch at a small German farm house. Much later, after walking all day and in to the night, the three reached Rostock. Contact was made with some Russian soldiers, who took them to a victory celebration where many toasts were made, ending up with toasts to Stalin, Roosevelt and Studebaker. It appeared that the Russians thought very highly of the Studebaker trucks that had been sent to them by Uncle Sam.

After the party, lodgings were arranged with a German family who also served breakfast to the three and pointed them in a westerly direction. During the second day, they had a number of rides with Russian soldiers in some of those Studebaker trucks. There was some walking on blistered feet and the final ride was in a horse drawn milk cart, driven by what appeared to be a former German

soldier in hobnailed boots. The ride in the milk cart took the three to the Canadian-Russian lines where they left the milk cart and were allowed to cross into Canadian territory. During the crossing the three were subjected to kisses on their cheeks by drunk Russian soldiers. All in all, it was a small price to pay. The fate of the driver of the milk cart was never learned.

Lodging for the second night was provided by the Canadian military and the next morning the three, along with some other exPOWs, were put on a bus and taken to Luneberg, Germany, the site of Montgomery's headquarters. Upon arrival at Luneberg, the three were billeted in a former German Barrack. That night, they met up with some members of the Royal Canadian Air Force and a VE day victory celebration was enjoyed by all. On the way back to the barracks, the Russian-speaking one of the three got separated from the other two and they didn't get back together until some weeks later in London. After breakfast on the morning of the fourth day, the remaining two walked out to the airfield, having just heard there were Spitfires out there with five bladed props.

After inspecting the unique Spitfires the remaining two noticed a C-47 parked with an American pilot standing nearby. One of the remaining two thought that he recognized the American pilot and went over and talked to him. The end result was a ride in the C-47 assigned to Marshal Montgomery's chief of staff, a Major General deGuinand.

As the C-47 approached Venlo, Holland, the pilot of the C-47 learned that a B-24 was preparing to take off for England.

Arrangements were made for the exPOWs in the C-47 to be transferred to the B-24 for the flight to England; after about a 45 minute flight, the remaining two and the other exPOWs were back on English soil, having landed at Tibenham, the base of the 445th bomb group.

They were the first Air Corps exPOWs to arrive at Tibenham and they were royally entertained that night (May 9, 1945). The next morning, May 10, 1945, the exPOW's were put on a train for London; the remaining two, still wearing the clothes they wore when they left Barth.

Upon leaving the train on arrival at London, the remaining two were arrested by overzealous MPs for lack of proper uniform. When the remaining two were allowed to speak and explain their circumstances, the attitude of the MP's changed for the better and the remaining two were taken to a reception center arriving just after the arrival of 1st Lt. John Winant, J., the son of the Ambassador to the Court of St James. Following a stay in a military hospital near Cambridge, the remaining two were separated, one going home on an LST and the other one going home on the HMS Queen Mary.

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