

KRIEGIES DISCUSS THEIR BIG ESCAPE

AMERICAN airmen discuss serious risks of hunger, thirst, dangerous activity and fears associated with their escape attempts and laugh about some of it today!

This is a transcription from a taped discussion by three Ex-POW's that had been prisoners of war in Germany during World War II. Their names are Charles "Chuck" Roth, Claire "Rusty" Swarmer and Paul Giddens. The transcription was done by Martin "Marty" Parisot who also was a POW in Stalag 7A and Stalag 17-B. Parisot was not well enough acquainted with the three and did not recognize their voices too well. There were times when the three were talking simultaneously so Marty did the best he could. Marty used his Apple II GS computer and AppleWorks word processor. He also used a spell checker.

Chuck Well, Rusty seems to be more inclined to know more about where we were and what we were doing than I am.

Rusty Well, I don't think I do.

Chuck Oh, yes you do.

Rusty You know, Meinhardt told us something last night that you guys had heard about when they marched us out of the camp that we were heading for the gas chambers at Mauthausen.

Chuck Well I heard a little about that, you know that they had a little report that Hermann Goering was told to get rid of us. And the SS troopers didn't follow his orders too good and Goebbels was gone and they didn't get the orders through.

Chuck Now this was what I heard, just some scuttle butt you know.

Paul Well I heard some similar scuttle-butt that Hitler or the high group had ordered that at they should kill all prisoners at the end of the war.

Paul However I heard that the Army and the Air Force and all had just a little more common sense than that and they wouldn't do it.

Chuck Than what the radicals did who were issuing the orders at that time because they had lost control more or less.

Chuck You remember that the Sarge that we called Schultz. He was the fighter pilot that had punctured his ear drums and he had been hurt pretty bad and had been shot down by a 17 in other words in France. I always more or less, when I could talk to Schultz, he could talk pretty good English. But whatever he told me I more or less believed. Now that other little German in the coat, I can't think of what his name was, we had a name for him, we called him bad names, but to me, he was more of a war-monger to me. He gave you all kinds of scuttle-butt about what the German Army was supposed to be doing and there was none of it true. Toward the end though, he came in to our barracks or somebody else's barracks and listened to the BBC broadcast so he could get the news because he said they had taken all of the radio tubes out of their radios so they couldn't listen. Now that is what he told me, the little German.

Chuck Schultz was the only one that I tried to protect when the Americans first broke into the woods there at Braunau. The first thing that I saw was this little sergeant, he was like Shorty Gordon and when he first came in there, he asked who do you want to get rid of, I will fix em! I will fix them. They were ready to get rid of the guards whoever we wanted to get rid of.

Paul Well at the time there when we were in the woods there we had practically nothing but old men and kids.

Chuck Old men and kids.

Paul And none of the camp guards there or if they were there were very few.

Chuck There was one though in the overcoat and he had helped my group, who he was I can't remember one guy told me he had run my group when we left the camp, I can't think of his name.

Rusty It wasn't Gerlach?

Chuck Yeah that sounds right.

Paul Gerlach was with us at the end there.

Rusty He was a highly educated man, he was a PhD wasn't he?

Paul I don't know.

Chuck He was something like that.

Chuck I told this little sergeant that come in there with the machine gun I said to the sergeant, now this man is all right. He has helped us all along down the road. Don't get rid of him!

Rusty Do you remember Captain Peoples in our compound? The German officer that was in charge of our compound?

Paul That was Paletta. Peoples came before Paletta.

Rusty Peoples, at the end of the war there in the woods. He came up to me after we had been liberated and he said "Oh Mr. Swarmer, I am so happy to see you, I have been I have been treated so rudely today." The damned blood was running down his chin you know, where someone had smacked him in the mouth.

Chuck Oh really!

Rusty I says sure, just a minute, I have to go and ask Charley though and I walked up the road and I never went back though, and the last I heard was that they had had a two minute court-martial in the field there and had shot him. Because he was a Nazi.

Paul Oh! really!

Rusty Yeah, he was a strict one. But he was never bad to us.

Paul As far as Nazis go, I don't think that I ever met a German that didn't support the bad German government.

Chuck No the only thing that I would say about Sergeant Schultz, as I called him because he was a non-commissioned officer, is that he would give us the right that we were warriors like he was, he put us on the same plane as him and he would listen to what we had to say, and then he would give me his version of what the German Army brought him through in his training, and what they had to honor, and he was, you can't say that he was a soldier of fortune but at least he wouldn't honor another soldiers rights and there were a lot of them that wouldn't do that.

Rusty There were some though that were strictly rotten from the inside out. I told some of you fellows that there was someone that lives in our condominium complex that was in the ground forces, and he was captured in the battle of the bulge, and he was in Stalag 9 where-ever that was. He said that they had a camp commander there and he was really a bastard, he gave them the worst treatment possible. This fellow from my complex said that when they had been liberated by the Americans, this fellow ran over and took down the camp flag that flew over the camp, and he has the flag today that he taken while he was in Germany. And he says the last thing that he saw when they went out the gate was this camp commanders head sitting up on top of the gate post. Some of the GI's had chopped his head off and set it up there.

Chuck I am sure that some of that feeling, but I never saw any of it.

Paul I'm sure there was.

Chuck I never did either, but I do know there was one of those snitching Germans there, some of the guys in the woods there that thought we ought to get rid of him, and I said, let's not judge those people by their color right now. I said I think that they will be taken care of by the Army and the court martial's and so forth if they were that bad, you know. Because really, during all of the time that I was there the whole 27 months, I didn't get inhumane treatment. I may have felt that it wasn't fair. The German guards treated me probably as about as good as I would have treated them under the same circumstances.

Rusty Well one thing they didn't have anything for themselves.

Chuck No!

Rusty At the end of the war. They had nothing!

Chuck They had nothing.

Rusty And they couldn't give us any more than what they had.

Paul The one guy, like I told Giddens, I felt sorry for, was that captain. He always came out and said "Gutten Morgen!" and Gutt abend when he left. When he came back in, after that big raid, by the Americans had done on Berlin, and he had lost his wife and kids and everything. He didn't say a thing when he came out that day. Our whole compound took one step forward and said good morning to him. He just turned around and walked off. I don't think that he ever did express himself after that. I sure did feel a little compassion for him because he had lost his family and it had preceded him there. Now I did hear this from this sergeant Schultz. He was the one that kept us from going out our little compound down up over there to the delousing chamber. We didn't walk past the White House when we did this. And I would always go up and talk to him. Because he always just struck me as a German soldier, and that was all he pretended to be. But he wasn't really a radical Nazi German. He was just a common ordinary soldier as far as I was concerned. But what I wanted to get to here on tape, and I had talked to quite a few people, and I thought half of those people got off of that train when we got off. Now I don't know, I came back into camp, like I said, Rusty and I come before that German officer that was sitting at that table, and we had been talking to the guards when they took us back into Munich on the train, do you remember that? When we got on at that little station. And what were they? They were Luftwaffe people. They picked us up at this little station and they said, "Oh, this is your first time probably a week, five days or seven days, this is all you will get." So we walked in there and he wanted to know what our occupation was, and Rusty says hobo, and I said hobo and he says, "Wass ist diss?" "Everybody hobo, nobody works". And he says, "eight days". And Rusty says well this is our first time. And he says, "ten days". I says that isn't right and he says, "twelve days", and Rusty started and I says, "Shut up Rusty! We will be here for the rest of the war!"

Rusty So we ended up with what?

Chuck I think it was eighteen days or two weeks that we had to stay in I don't know what they called it but----

Rusty You know there is one guy that we will never be able to find about, that little Aussie that was in the boob there with us. You remember a little guy from Australia. He used to get those guards so damned mad, he would spit at them, and they would stand us outside there, and he would start to go back in the building and they would push him back out and he would spit at them. They gave him a bad time too and they should have.

Paul Well you know the only time we could get anything was from the Frenchmen on the other end of that barracks. We would pull it through that drain if we wanted anything to eat.

Paul That was the telephone! They called it the telephone. It was a little hole. It was probably, I don't think it was six inches square but it was something like that. It went between the one washroom on the free side and the washroom on the prisoner side.

Paul Any time that one of your somebody of your nationality. They had something for you and they tried to take care of us.

Chuck They did, they took pretty good care of us.

Paul And they would bring stuff down. And the guy would say the telephone, you are wanted on the telephone. We have a package for you and they would push it through. And you didn't tell them what your sentence was ten days or what it was. We were 10 days on bread and water.

Chuck Yeah, we got bread and water. And then one day that we got soup.

Paul Once a week. Once a week you got something besides bread and water.

Rusty I don't remember that.

Chuck I am still not clear what we done before we got on the train. But I know it was like Giddens says. We were figuring we were getting off when we got on there and how the three of us got into one group to split up our groceries and our clothes and our few little maps that we had. When we got in that boxcar we had the stuff!

Paul We had the stuff and we had the group that was going.

Chuck But I thought that there was more than us. And I can't

Rusty It seems to me that there was one more. That was supposed to go out with us. And I don't remember who it was. It was one of the guys, we didn't know him too well. We knew who he was when we were in camp. But we didn't know him too well. We hadn't known him as long as we knew each other. We hadn't known him as we did the three of us.

Chuck You know who I think it was, it was that little Jew from New York. I can't tell you his name and I was mad at him when I got in the boob. He came over to the fence then and was talking to me and I said "I am going to get out of here, and I am going to punch you right square in the nose!" He never did come back. "He said I'll give you anything like a parcel or anything". When I got out of the boob I didn't find him for a week. And I finally, got over it. But I was after him. For some reason he had messed us up somehow.

Paul Well I'll tell you what he was doing. He was high grading our stuff when it was coming down.

Chuck That's what he was doing! And I was going to fix him and I can't remember his name. He was a little Jew.

Paul Saltz.

Chuck Saltz?

Paul I think that is what his name was.

Chuck I think you are right, Paul. But I know I was after him and I scared him clear through the fence.

Chuck Now when we got on that train, we got off in the dark. When did we load? Was it in the afternoon? Does anybody have the date?

Rusty I got it down but I don't have it here.

Paul March the 23rd was it?

Rusty The 27th. March 27th. I have the dates when we got shot down. And how long it took us to get from Tunis and to Rome. Through Naples. The airport was in Naples. I think where they set us down. And they took us into Rome from there. The length of time that it took to get us on the train from Rome to Dulag Luft. And the length of time in Dulag Luft. The dates that we left and arrived at Stalag 8B.

Chuck You guys both went to 8B too.
 Rusty Yeah!
 Chuck Is that where you got your dog tags?
 Rusty Yeah
 Chuck They are all 8B tags.
 Rusty What's your number?
 Paul I don't remember.
 Chuck I think its 27438.
 Rusty Mine is 27436.
 Chuck We were pretty close. We were just two numbers apart. You must have beat me.
 Rusty Well they have their alphabet backward. R comes after S in German!
 Paul I am trying to remember this now. We knew the day before or a few days before that we were going to be moved. I know that we got together and I don't think that Saltz was in that group, because I would have objected.
 Chuck OK
 Paul I wouldn't go out or over the fence or anywhere else with that guy!
 Virginia Was Kurtenbach involved in this?
 Chuck I think that's wrong. It was kind of like Giddens says. We held him up and he used his big feet to kick the wire off that window. That was in the upper end of the boxcar.
 Paul We didn't go out the door, we went out of the window.
 Rusty Went out the window, right!
 Rusty There was no window there it was just a hole.
 Paul We worked the wire off so we wouldn't get cut too bad and I think that I went out the window first.
 Chuck I think you did.
 Rusty I think you did.
 Paul You guys were holding on to me so that if I slipped or something I wouldn't fall. And then I worked my way around in between. I don't know who came second.
 Chuck I think it was Rusty. I think that it was me that was the last to have jumped off.
 Rusty I think I was the second because I know I was the second that jumped off. I think you were the one that jumped off the train first. And I jumped off second. And the train was slowing down for Regensburg wasn't it?
 Chuck To me it was crossing a bridge, I don't know.
 Paul We were in the yard.
 Chuck We were coming into a yard of some kind.
 Rusty We skidded for about ten feet after we had hit the ground before we stopped. I looked up like that, and there was a switch handle right up against my head.
 Chuck We were so close because I almost hit the same thing. My parcel just kept sliding you know, and I was riding the parcel down. I didn't want to skin my hands and arms and everything up. When I got up, here was a whole stack of railroad rails. I just stopped before I hit them. I had to jump off the right second in the dark. Just about like you did. You wrapped yourself around a switch arm.
 Paul We must have ridden the outside that train between those cars. We must have ridden that for at least an hour.
 Chuck Quite a while.
 Paul It was going too dog gone fast!
 Chuck I think it must have been making 45 miles an hour!
 Paul At least!
 Rusty This is why we had such a tough time convincing that civilian dentist over there in that jail. Remember that he was the dentist, and the only guy in that town that spoke English or something. In that Wollenzak where we got taken after we got recaptured. We couldn't convince him that anybody could jump off a moving train and live.
 Chuck I remember that now.
 Paul You should have reminded him that hobos did that well!
 Rusty I was just telling Chuck at lunch time that I had done that before.
 Chuck Yeah, that's what he just telling me and that he rode the rails. I guess that's why we come up with that hobo deal when we walked back in to get sentenced.
 Chuck Anyway, that first time when we got off of there, it seemed like we went quite a ways. We decided that the only maps we had, was going to France. We didn't have anything that was telling us which way we were going! I don't know why, but 7A to me, was quite a bit South of the Danube river? Down by Munich and Moosburg. I don't know the Danube river was from there.
 Paul The Danube was a small stream not far from Moosburg. (Actually the stream was a tributary of the Danube, named Isar) Or was it the canal? (There also was a canal) Anyway I thought that when we walked out of Moosburg to go to the cemetery on the work details. Now did any of you fellows go on a work detail?
 Chuck No!
 Rusty No. I never was on one.
 Paul Well I was on a work detail. We would switch--this was from the Army boys, the privates and the corporal's they had to go out and work.
 Chuck Yeah, uh huh.
 Paul And we didn't have to go out and work because we were sergeants.
 Chuck Yeah they said we could, I remember.
 Paul No we weren't allowed to.
 Chuck Oh! We weren't allowed to?
 Paul Not on those details. However what we would do is, we would switch identities.
 Chuck To go out--
 Paul Some of us would go out to see what the outside was like. And we would walk out there. Now some fellows escaped that way. What they-- and it was a simple maneuver. They would take oh, 20 or 30 of us and walk us over to the cemetery, and we would work and clean up and do whatever we had to do during the day. Then we would walk back and there was one particular corner in the road that the lead man, because the German guards were always a few men behind on each side. A guy could drop off and they would never see him drop off as they went around this curve. And there were several that did this while we were at Stalag 7A.
 Chuck Did you go on one of these details?

Paul I went on some of the details however I never tried to escape. We were working this so that only certain people I mean, we didn't want it to be too many at a time. And I can remember a fellow with a name of Smith that went on. That's the only name that I remember.

Chuck I remember Shorty Gordon. Do you remember that name? He's the one that measured the street right out of 7A. He had a string or a tape or something. And they just measured the deal and kept going out the guard gate and nobody contested them, and they just went on down and I watched him and finally he was over a little hill. I figured he must have got away but he wasn't away very long.

Paul Now there was another way that people got out of the camp. Each group had a man of confidence and at 7A they allowed the man of confidence to go in and out up to the headquarters. He could take a person with him occasionally. And they did and there were two or three fellows that I know of. What they did, the man of confidence would take them up there, and they had a rest room in one of the buildings. It was back around and you would get them up there about quitting time, and they would hide in the rest room, and then go out the window at night. That was the second way that people got out. And there weren't many because you couldn't overdo it! You know that they counted us going out and coming in on the details. But we would come back in on a ragged basis so they couldn't get a good count and we would break and run after we got inside just to confuse them and that was the same thing that we would do the next day on roll call. You remember when they would come along counting them, some of the guys would shift in there and they would lose their count. That's the way we would hide it sometimes because some were gone.

Rusty Do you remember who it was that went out on the work detail? I thought it was a GI that escaped from the work detail and this guy stole a cow! He walked the cow day and night and after he walked it for three or four days, the cow died!

Chuck And he got caught because the cow died.

Chuck You know the biggest thing that I remember at 7A, being there, was from noon until 12:30, or was it from noon until one o'clock? We had what you called a black market. All the compounds were open, and you went in to the center and you could trade for whatever you had. If you had English tea, or American coffee or the little packs of cigarettes or something, you could trade for what produce or whatever the Pollacks and Russians and Serbs or the French. They came in there with produce from outside the camp. You could get cabbage and you could get potatoes once in a while or a loaf of bread. And this was where I spent my time. I was trying to work up this commodity market and we had pretty good eats. Gee whiz!

I know one time there I got a duck. And we had, not a bunsen burner but was a whole lot like it, it was an alcohol stove that we traded for and that took almost one whole parcel to get that stove, so that we could cook this silly duck! You can't do nothing with a duck on those ceramic stoves that the Germans had. By the time that you got the skin and everything off of the duck you had raw meat! We couldn't get anyone to eat that. So we had to get this stove. We had boiled duck soup and that was so greasiest stuff that I had ever seen in my life! You couldn't swallow it hardly. We kept dipping the grease off and finally we made a candle out of it and burned at a poker game.

Paul Lets see, we came in-- you must have come in about the same time as we did from ?? 17B?

Chuck Well awfully close.

Paul The reason I say that is when we first came to 8B. From roll call in the morning until roll call in the evening, we had a free run of the camp.

Chuck Yeah you could almost walk--Only you couldn't get into the Russians.

Paul Well there were times----

Chuck The Russians came over to me but----

Rusty That was a repatriation camp wasn't it? Didn't they send them there to be repatriated?

Paul That was a transition camp, I know that, but it was a lot of things! I do know this, when we first got there, we had almost free run of the camp. After we had been there we could go down by the chapel or we could go down to the kitchen or we could into were the British were.

THERE WAS A BIG GAP ON THE TAPE HERE.

Chuck With our sons or our grandsons.

Chuck They sent the sons back to work the farms and the old people come and served the prison sentence. I thought that was pretty neat, but I don't know how that would work with the Americans.

Paul Then after we had been there for a while and it wasn't too long. Some of our fellows pulled something and they decided that it wasn't such a good idea to have all of this fraternization, they started locking us up in our own compound. The only time you could get out is when you had to go to the headquarters, or to the lazarette or when a small group had to go to the kitchen to get potatoes and they put a particular guard at the gate of each compound. So this was a big change. You see this was happening rather rapidly and it was during this period wasn't it, that they brought all that Army bunch? Up from a battle in North Africa or Kasserine pass that they had captured them?

Chuck That they captured all of the cooks and the musicians.

Paul And the artillery and everything. They just captured practically the whole army, when they overran them. And they brought those fellows up. That's when we had been quite a number of Americans. Prior to that there hadn't been many.

Rusty No, there were just a handful.

Chuck No there hadn't been. Was that before we escaped or after we came back?

Paul I think that was before, because didn't these Army guys go up with you to Stalag 3?

Chuck That's why I thought there were so many on the train. It must have been.

Paul A lot of these fellows were Army. They weren't Air force.

Chuck They sent a lot of them there into 7A. Just before we moved out.

Rusty They weren't there very long.

Paul They were there only a few days or a week or two. It was just a short time and during this short time that they were there they were lining us up and they were separating out those that had to go out, or the ones that they could get to volunteer. They would go out to the farms. Or the ones that they could send out as groups. They were pulling out a lot of these fellows regularly to go out and work.

Chuck They were putting our Army people to work they were privates and pfc's, you had to be at least a corporal or more.

Paul The corporal's down had to work!

Chuck That is right! Buck sergeants didn't have to work.

Rusty That's right, Buck sergeants didn't have to work. I remember talk was it was while they were bringing them in? It couldn't have been while they were bringing them in, it had to have been later. They were putting them to work in the coal mines up in the northern part of the country. Do you remember that? It must have been after we came from 3B?

Paul Well 3B they didn't bring any of the Army back.

Rusty They left them there?

Paul They left them there.

Rusty Well there might have been a few, that came back under a similar identification.

Paul Well there might have been a few switches in identification like you said. However it was the Air force that came back from 3B to 7A.

Chuck Now did the Air force come to 7A from 3B?

Paul Yes.

Chuck And then we went to 17B?

Paul Yes.

Rusty Remember for a while there, we were the only Americans in 7A.

Chuck There weren't very many of us.

Paul Wait a minute now, while we were out there were a few brought in. Saltz was brought in.

Chuck Saltz was brought in because that's the guy like you said was picking the top of our parcels and we weren't getting our food.

Paul We weren't getting our food. There were a few of them but I would say that it was probably under 50, by the time that I got out of the boob. These guys had been brought in since the train had left there.

Chuck Well that's why I figured so many had escaped because I had been back out of the boob with Rusty. Gee whiz! There were as many people as when we left to go up there. There were a lot of people there. Kurtenbach said there was about 90, in two box cars. And then when we got out they put everybody in one boxcar.

Paul Essentially they were 40 and 8's. They had tried more or less to put 40 in each boxcar. They went by the 40 and 8 rule. They loaded us up there and they started loading us up early in the afternoon. And while they were loading us up there they were having the Russians soldiers up there, nailing barbed wire over the holes in the cars. This Russian that was nailing the barbed wire on ours. He was doing a good job for us if we wanted to escape. He was pounding the nail like nobodies business so that it wouldn't hold anything. All that it would hold was the wire for somebody to shake when they checked it. It was easy to knock off, it was easy to kick off. So the Russian was doing us a favor. It was just about dark when we started pulling out of there.

Rusty It must have been around midnight?

Chuck Well to me it was late and dark. And the train started slowing up and we decided we had better get off of here.

Paul It had been dark for quite a while. We had to get off. We didn't want to go back in that car.

Chuck We figured that if we waited until we got into the yard where they were pulling in to, they would see that we were gone we would be caught right on the train.

Paul We would be captured right quick!

Chuck Maybe that was the yard where they stopped and changed people and everything. As I remember we had bypassed that yard. We were trying to cross a river. What the hell river were we trying to cross?

Paul It was a big river. I thought that it was the Danube.

Chuck Well that's what I had in mind.

Paul I always thought that it was up by Regensburg but I wouldn't swear to that.

Rusty That's what I thought too! We got off as we were approaching the yards into Regensburg!

Paul It was definitely a big yard, it wasn't a small place.

Chuck It was a marshaling yard or whatever you wanted to call it. We walked a long way until we got to that bridge.

Paul We didn't make it to that bridge on the first night.

Rusty Didn't we? Was it the second night?

Paul It was about the second or the third night that we made it.

Chuck It must have been the second or third.

Rusty I was always under the impression that we made it the first night.

Chuck Well I think we got near there. I know our first decision that we had made was that we would walk at night and hide during the daytime. We hid one whole day, we decided we wanted to go West. We couldn't go South. We said why climb the damned mountains? If we could get across the river we could probably hook onto another train or something, and go near France. That way we wouldn't have to walk so far.

Paul Now the first night we got off of the train and the train went on past us. We went over and saw the barbed wire fence over there, and we got out of the yard as quickly as we could. We started walking at right angles to the railroad tracks so that we would get as far away from the rails as we could.

Chuck We figured that after the train had stopped they would find out that we was gone we was going to get caught in the yards.

Paul All I remember is we walked until it was almost daylight. In fact it was a little light because we could see where we should get off into the countryside. And so we got up there on the hillside and we laid down and slept.

Paul And then we saw people the next day going by and we saw a German soldier going by and different things. And we stayed there in the woods all day as I remember. And we got on this road the next night after dark and we started walking. And there were other people walking! We figured that if we didn't get too close to them and we didn't talk too much they wouldn't give us any problem. Somewhere along that line we walked to the road. Somewhere along we found we were walking parallel to a river, or along the river.

Chuck We were figuring we had to cross this river. To go West we couldn't go much farther. The river seemed to be bending to the South.

Paul And I remember we went down to the bank to look at the river.

Chuck We decided that the river was too wide to swim across.

Paul We were kinda looking for a boat or something or hoping there would be something. We found a boat. The only dad gummed thing it was chained down pretty tight. And then we went back up and we walked along--

Chuck We decided we would have to get across and we figured the railroad bridge would be better than a road bridge. I do remember that and whether it was the same railroad that we got off on, I don't know.

Paul I don't know either--I don't think it was because I think it was going in a different direction. I think that we knew our directions pretty good.

Chuck It was a heck of a long bridge!

Rusty Yeah

Chuck Boy! I couldn't believe, that bridge must have been a half of a mile long! Because we sat there and we figured out now, do we all want to go at once, or are we going to separate, or what are we going to do? And ah, we decided that we'd get a block apart and go across this bridge.

Paul And I was the one that got chosen to be number one and I've said that we drew straws, but I don't know whether we drew straws or not--

Chuck We said he was the biggest and let's send him!

Paul All I know is we had decided that I would be first.

Rusty I think we drew straws as I remember.

Chuck We might have!

Paul It was probably, because that detail, I don't remember, all I remember it was decided that I was first--

Chuck You were first--and I was second--

Paul And I walked across as quietly as I could.

Chuck And I thought you made it.

Paul And I got to the far end of the bridge, and I suddenly found that there three men there besides me!

Chuck Yeah, it was dark! It was dark! It was dark!

Paul And they had guns! So

Chuck The first thing I heard was "Haltzen sie!" or something like that and then----

Rusty Yeah

Chuck The next thing about the next thing I heard was, "Comrades!"

Paul And they took me, the two of them, now there might of been more than three but I don't think so-- I think there was only three there and two of them took me to the local policeman. And he put me in a cellar.

Chuck Well, I don't know where you went, all I heard-- they were asking for comrades--and the only thing I could hear you say was, "Nichten comrades! Nichten comrades!" We couldn't talk anyway. But I thought well, Boy! We are across the river, because I could look down. I didn't know how high we were, and I decided well, "Gee whiz! We ought to be able to drop to the sloping bank or something and I was down there and had the parcel on one arm and was hanging on with one hand like this and here come Rusty and he says "Chuck! Where the hell are you?"

Chuck I says I'm down here. And He says--

Rusty Well get back up here!

Chuck I don't think I can--you know, but I did I finally got the parcel back up there, and got back up on the bridge. And He says, "Well you know they caught Paul". And I says--"Yeah, I'm sure they did!" I says, "We're gonna have to get off of this bridge!" So we went back. And we went up on the hillside. And I remember we stayed there all night wondering what are we going to do now?

Rusty We never did cross that river.

Chuck No we never did. We decided well we are gonna have to go South.

Rusty Apparently we were ah on the wrong side of the river the river made a bend or something that was in a direction that we didn't know.

Chuck Well we didn't have any maps and we couldn't read the road signs for nothing. All they had on there was a bunch of names and so many kilometers. And that was as far as I knew we were going and I thought well we are gonna have to change directions and he and I decided that France is too far away, and we are gonna have to cross a bridge and if the bridges are all guarded like they were we haven't got much chance. So we decided that we would go South And I don't know if this was the first day that you and I were alone, but we were up here in these bushes and this farmer come out, and his dog was barking at us and he was from here to that dresser, the dumb dog pointing right at our bush you know, and the farmer was hollering at the dog to come back. He thought he had a rabbit or something I guess and I started throwing little bitty rocks at him, and the dog I finally hit him some where, and he yelped a little bit and went back over and left us alone and we spent most of that day just kind of crawling from bush to bush to get around this little farm.

Paul I would like to ask you fellows, when I got off of that train, I have never had an exhilarating feeling like I had that time.

Chuck Oh, I thought we really pulled something!

Paul I mean, I was so exhilarated!

Chuck I thought we had really pulled something I really did!

Rusty Oh I felt that way too!

Paul I never felt so happy and free!

Rusty I figured we were going home man! Let's go!

Paul That was

Chuck In fact I felt like patting him on the back. I thought, by God! We made it and didn't get hurt you know!

Paul In fact, it was amazing!

Paul And I was just wondering if you had the same feeling?

Chuck Oh! Yeah, I felt good.

Paul Boy! I felt good that time! And it was funny because I never had felt so exhilarated at that point

Rusty Not that exhilarated!

Chuck Well, I never felt so bad! that you got caught so quick! Damn! we should have done something different!

Rusty Well I'll tell you one thing, I couldn't have been with a better person than Chuck!

Paul Yeah.

Rusty Because Chuck was an outdoors man. Apparently when he was a kid, he became pretty familiar with the outdoors because he didn't have to have a compass to know North and South.

Paul Yeah!

Rusty He knew directions! I'd say no its like this and he would say--This is South over here. And he was right!

Chuck Well, we went quite a ways, but, now what did we do after the first night? I can remember sketches of this stuff. We parked some place up on a hill and here come all of these dumb gliders! You remember them, taking off at this air field, I don't remember if that was the second night or the third

Rusty Yeah! I remember that.

Chuck I thought the first one, the plane that pulled it off, the glider just barely went over us, you know, and I thought God! That's a big glider! And it must have full of people or something!

Rusty The thing, that is one of the most outstanding, memories of that escape, was it was after, four or five days, that it got cold.

Chuck Oh, it was raining! All the time!

Rusty And it started to rain and we were sleeping in the daytime and walking at night and we would wake up in the evening and our clothes would be frozen to us. Our hair would be just sopping wet! Just absolutely frozen!

Chuck And I remember this one night boy this is far enough! We are going to get in this barn. So we crawled up in this barn and got in the hay! Well, it was ah, Oh, a little after midnight or some thing and I said, "Gee! There's a cow down here! Rusty, lets go and milk that thing!" And he says, "Well, I don't know if I can milk a cow". "Well", I says, "I can!" and we had a pot of some kind. I don't know where we got this pot, but I went down and milked the cow! And, Boy! I got a bunch! You know, and I found some chickens, so we got the eggs! And we were crawling up back in the mow and here come this farmer, about daylight, and he was looking under these chickens and lifting them up, and cursing these chickens, no eggs! Then he went over and he tried to milk this cow. "Rouer! rouer!" you know and slammed the door and went back in the house. He didn't get any milk, and I says boy we had better get out of the barn. So we got down in a ditch there and it was still pretty early and I can remember we got some water out of that creek. And we boiled these eggs and drank that milk, and Gee! that was good! Cause we had, I don't know what we had to eat! We didn't have a hell of a lot!

Rusty No, we didn't. We had very little! We had to be rationing ourselves close-

Chuck We had that one parcel and it was pretty damned close. I think we had one D-Bar. And we didn't have any bread! That I can remember.

END OF THE FRONT SIDE OF THE TAPE

Rusty It was quite a long ways.

Chuck And I said I would have killed myself, if I had of let go there.

Rusty Yeah, you would have never made it.

Chuck Because I would have had one of those flagpole's up my butt or something because I was above them. But anyway, we were a couple of nights out when we got this milk. And then I remember that I wanted some water, so bad! And we were right, oh, it was all countryfied, but like you said, we were so damned wet and cold, and I wanted some good water that we could boil and make some tea. And there was a, oh, I called it a gas station, I don't know what it was. Anyhow they had a pump, and a water fountain and stuff there, and I got up there to get this, our one only pan full of water. And I got up here, and here come some people down, with bicycles! And I thought, Jesus! we are gonna get caught. And to me there was a pump, a gas pump and a gas pump, and this water deal was in the middle, well I just stood right there in the middle, and to tell you how dark, it was! These people, there was one girl, I don't know, she was about 15 or something, no lights on these bicycles but they leaned the bicycles against the pumps, and she had the second one and she leaned it right into my hand, and I took hold of this handle bar and she walked away from the bicycle and never knew I was standing there. And I thought, well, do we want bicycles? and thought, no! we had better not do that because that way they will know, that somebody stole their bicycles. So I pushed her bicycle back and leaned it against the other pump, and I never did get my water.

Virginia: Where was Rusty?

Chuck He was down in this ditch, waiting for me to get the water!

Rusty Was that the time that we drank the water out of the ditch?

Chuck Yeah, ah huh, and that about made us sick! I knew we shouldn't be doing this because it didn't smell too good, let alone taste too good, but you know after a day and a night without water, you are gonna drink something! And I remember that night! And then, we did, we found a farmer, going to a dump, with a bunch of old potatoes he dug out of a cellar or something, and they were about rotten! And we were walking along, and it wasn't quite dark yet and it was getting in the evening and we decided we're not going to wait until dark, we are gonna see where we are going a little bit, and we rode on that dang wagon until he got to where he was dumping these potatoes, and we didn't converse with him, he just let us get up on the wagon, more or less, and we said "Danke schonen!" or something and rode to here and we helped him to shovel these potatoes and dirt and stuff off and then Rusty and I here we were peeling all of these rotten potatoes and getting the good little pieces out of them and we did cook a fire that night and we had boiled potatoes and I don't know what else. And then we got down to where about all we seemed to have was some tea! This was another night and it was about dark I said well I'm going see if I can't get some bread or something, and I don't know whether you and I both went into this shop, I can't remember but anyway this lady had a loaf of bread and some other little thing and she couldn't and she couldn't quite give us enough for this one ounce of tea. It was English tea and she didn't think she was giving us enough, I don't remember if we got cabbage or a piece of bread or something, but I thought, Oh boy! was I ever glad to get rid of that tea and get something that we could sink our teeth into because English tea and me wasn't getting along too good anyway, when that's all you had, and we finished that night out and then we got up on some hillside and do you remember this, they were having a party down in this silly village?

Rusty Oh, yes! Yeah! And playing accordions.

Chuck I don't know if it was a wedding or saturday evening or what it was, we sat up there and they were playing accordions and just having a ball and dancing around down there and I thought, and here we are just starving to death watching this damned party and we can't go down there and get anything to eat.

Rusty That might have been the night that it got cold too!

Chuck I think that was the coldest night.

Rusty That might have been the one when it rained and froze.

Chuck Cause we were getting up in high country, I don't know where we were, but I know it was snowing, it hadn't melted that next morning and like you said our clothes were frozen and our hair was frozen. But anyway we were getting about to the end of our rope we didn't have too much to eat, to me we still had thirty miles to go or something for some reason we kind of knew where we were and whether we had read a road sign or what it was that said 46 kilometers or something to a border, all I could read was the border, I don't know what it was but it said border and we figured that that probably was Switzerland.

Rusty Well, that following night, after that party I think was the night when my chest started to ache so damned bad I couldn't breath. I just

Chuck He was really having trouble, I said God! you are going to catch pneumonia.

Rusty And you remember we went down into this town and beat on doors! trying to give up! So somebody could or I could get some attention or something.

Chuck Or get some help. He needed some medicine.

Rusty We beat on doors and we couldn't get anybody to come to the door. And it must have been ten or twelve at night.

Chuck All we could hear was "heraus! heraus!" (get out!).

Chuck Yeah, it was late!

Rusty And they wouldn't come to the door for anything!

Chuck Anyway we did put out that night, and then the next day the sun was shining, it was pretty, I thought, jeaz! maybe we will make it! but Rusty was catching a fever, he was red! you know and you could feel him and he was getting hot, and the only thing I can remember is here's this bunch of Russians down here, preparing this field, I don't know what the hell they were doing, whether they were digging ditches or planting potatoes or what it was, but anyway they

were working in this field, and Rusty and I talked and I said if we could just go with them and get in their barracks or wherever they sleep at night maybe a good nights warm dry and get our clothes dried because we were still wet! I think, it just seems like we never got dry, and so we decided to go down and talk to them and this was in the afternoon, I don't know, maybe after two or three o'clock, something like that, and you can't talk to Russians! What do you say? The only thing that I could remember to say in Russian was _____, and to me, it wasn't very nice! Maybe it meant, Go screw yourself, or something like that. I don't know just exactly what it meant, but we told them we wanted to work with them and ah, they wouldn't give us a shovel or a hoe or nothing and here come one of em that looked just like him on a bicycle! he wanted to know "Arbeit, Arbeit!" (get to work!) and I think I was the one that opened up my mouth and says "Nicht arbeit, Americano!" You know and God! He went about that far off of that bicycle seat and away he went back to town. And it wasn't very long and we got picked up, and they came out with pitch forks.

Rusty It seems to me that we were at that area, because of the fact that it was a railroad ran through there, and they were supposed to either take coal out of there over to Switzerland, or to bring coal back.

Chuck Something like that.

Rusty And I don't know how we got the information. It may be that my memory is ah, not right, but they said that, they white-washed the coal, they filled the car with coal and then they would white-wash it. So that if any of the coal was turned over, that, it would be obvious. And it seemed to me that we were in that area, because we were hoping to jump on the train, and go over into Switzerland.

Chuck To see if we couldn't go that way. I know that that was our idea but when we got messed up and this guy come with all of the village out there, to take us back in, we were done and we figured we were, and like you said, no one in that town that could talk English. And, I did have a leather jacket on, and I can't remember what you were wearing, I don't think you were dressed as good as I was.

Rusty I didn't happen to have-----

Chuck You didn't have a leather jacket on, I don't know he was wet! I know, yet! and this like you said we talked to a dentist, I didn't even remember that until you said today, that the one dentist could speak a little bit of American,

Rusty I don't know if you remember this! ah, when we were in there talking to the dentist, we were trying to make ourselves understood, and he wanted to write it down, and he couldn't read our writing, so there was a typewriter there, and I typed, and I typed

Chuck Yeah! I do remember that.

Rusty I typed whatever it was that we were trying to say and the only difference in the keyboard was that they "u" with the umlaut and a couple other pronunciation,

Paul Double s's and a few things like that

Rusty Something like that, the only difference in our keyboards some of the words probably didn't make any sense at all that I typed on his machine but, ah

Chuck He got our drift, I know that.

Rusty He got enough to know what we were trying to say.

Chuck And then as I remember, it was getting toward evening then, and they took us to this, well, I say it was a jail, I don't know what it was--Wehrmacht Station.

Paul Up until this time, had they fed you anything up until this time?

Chuck Not! No! I don't think so. But we got, toward evening, they hauled us to this jail and this lady, real nice, looks like, ah, Virginia! over there!

Paul Yah.

Chuck Just, nice!

Paul Only German.

Chuck Wonderful German lady, see. OK, Well, French or German, but she's still nice. So anyway, she wanted to know and you know we told them we were hungry and cold. They put us in this cell, and it did have dry bunks in it. I can't remember whether it had two I think in the same room or something, but anyway, we wanted something to eat and she said ah "Jawohl! Jawohl!" you know, and here she came back with ah, some kind of biscuits in a stew pot or something, she didn't have a whole lot but, boy! that was good because it was hot and we were dry and had some bread to eat, Oh, man! I filled up.

Rusty Soup or Hot food!

Chuck It was hot food, then I can remember her, I don't know how we got this interpretation, but her son had got caught in Africa and was sent to America. Her big concern was how her son was being treated. And we said, very good! Very! good, they treat em real! good, you know. And anyway it seemed like we stayed there a couple of days--waiting for, they had to get a German, on vacation to take us back on the train to Munich.

Rusty Yes, right! I remember, on the train---I hadn't gone to the bathroom for seven days.

Chuck Wow! he was in shape!

Rusty And, ah, we got on this train, it must have been out of Munich because there was some soldiers! on there--

Chuck Yeah!

Rusty And, ah, I went in to the toilet, and locked the door and I was in there grunting and groaning and straining. I must have been in there for almost a half hour, I guess and he started beating on the door, you know, and I said "Ein moment!" or something like that, you know and ah, after a while, he beat on the door so hard and I finally opened it, I'm sitting on the toilet, you know, and no luck! you know, it was a wasted effort.

Rusty Oh, God!

Chuck You hadn't eaten enough to push it out!

Chuck Well we had lost quite a bit.

Rusty Oh, Hell yes!

Chuck I think I lost about 10 or 15 pounds! on that week we were out or whatever it was-----

Rusty Well you lost it I still had mine, but it was in a different position.

Chuck You were hung in there! But I do remember getting in this one train station, and I felt kinda sorry for those old German soldiers, they had those damned old green coats on and they had their rifles! some way propped up under their chins and they were sound asleep! Right there in the train station, standing up! I thought, How in the hell can people sleep standing up?

Chuck But, ah we talked a little bit to these airmen, they were on furlough! I guess they were going to Munich. I don't know but anyway, they were the ones that told us that we would only get three or four days, cause it was the first time and, they must have been able to talk some broken English to us some way because, we had a pretty good rapport with them and they said "Well Good Luck!" you know, and we wished them the same thing and then they come from Moosberg or 7A and hauled us back to camp. I think that was one of the last days and then, like I said, we got into this, he was a captain in my mind, I don't know what he was, some kind of German officer, sitting behind that damned desk. And as far

as I thought, we were the last ones to get caught. Now I don't know, to me, there was ah, I thought there were two or three hundred of us, that got on that train, but we must have had some Army people on there with us.

Paul My thinking is, you say two or three hundred. There was at least that many and maybe more.

Chuck There were a lot of privates and corporal's and stuff on there.

Rusty Most of them were ground forces.

Chuck Well they were cooks and like I said musicians.

Paul Yes they were ground forces. Yes there were a lot of them. You remember Spinelli, that Army photographer? He was in that group.

Rusty Well, this explains something that I see in the POW Bulletin you know about this guy Spinelli that had such a group of photo's that he will sell for ten ninety five or whatever it is.

Chuck But I can remember that I stayed up nearly one whole night writing post cards, German post cards to general stores and post offices in Kentucky and Tennessee and some place else, there were three states there and they said their folks couldn't read, but that if I sent it to the general stores, that guy could read, or he would get on the telephone and tell the folks that they were captured. And I thought, well gee whiz! I didn't know we had that many people in the United States, you know, I wasn't smart, but they were illiterate they couldn't spell, or they couldn't write their, well I guess they could write their name, they had to to get in the Army, I think! Or make an "X" anyway.

Paul I've seen people that the only signature that they had was an "X", their mark.

Chuck And if they didn't have the right name they made an "O", huh?

Chuck Well I, appreciate this you guys, Now Rusty you said that we were at Wollen--?

Rusty ----- spelled Wollenzach. That may not be the way the Germans pronounced it, but that was the town that we were taken to.

Chuck That was the name of the town that when we were captured we were put into the jail.

Virginia Do you really know that you were getting sick before you had this sharp pain in your chest?

Rusty No! I felt good.

Chuck He was doing fine. But all of a sudden he said his chest started hurting and then he started running a fever, because I know, hell! He was freezing, and his old head, the snow was running on it, and it was just steaming! He was running a hundred you know. He was just poking out steam.

Chuck Well I knew he was getting in bad shape. We had to get him to a hospital or something. That's why we pounded doors on that night and we couldn't get anyone to come to the door.

Rusty We couldn't give ourselves up.

Chuck We got a couple that said raus! raus!

Virginia How long did you pound?

Rusty How long did we pound?

Virginia Yeah.

Rusty Till they ran us out. They would come to the door and say get the hell out. No they would just tell us, raus, raus. However they said it in German. Get out of here!

Virginia Don't you suppose they didn't open doors at night?

Rusty Oh, No! Absolutely not. Because you know the gestapo or whoever-----

Chuck They didn't, they really didn't. However that's probably what they thought we were. And they weren't coming, we didn't break the door in. After a while they did open the door a crack, get away, raus, raus, you know. All we were trying to do is get in to where we could get warm and get some attention.

Rusty I got over that though without attention.

Chuck He really did! All he needed was two nights of dry sleeping! That's what I said. We were healthy animals because when we stayed in that jail, I think it was two nights, and gee, you got right over it!

Rusty Oh, yes.

Chuck And his fever broke, he needed food and dry clothes. It was what we needed.

Rusty Just get the hot food and a couple of nights rest.

Rusty I have all of those dates.

Chuck Do you?

Rusty The exact dates. The dates that we were recaptured, the number of days that we spent there. And to get us back to 7A.

Chuck Well that's real good. I want to get some of that stuff from you. I don't care how much you run off. You send it to me and send a bill. And I will sure get it.

Rusty Well read them off of the tape.

Chuck That will be fine. We can do that.

Rusty You know you can say so much more than you can write. You can say in five minutes than you can in an hour.

Chuck Like I said, I've got an hour and a half on here. That will be real fine. So maybe you can go to your book and get some of those.

Rusty So we've got tapes. And we can swap tapes.

Chuck OK. That will be real fine.

Virginia And maybe Rusty can go back in his mind and add things to it.

Chuck And whatever we have missed. If you can think of something do the same thing. And if we can get together here. I don't know whether we've got the only story that there is. But three guys getting off.

Paul The only thing, I was ah and they took me down and put me in this local policeman's cellar, which was barred.

Virginia Barred?

Paul Yeah, it had a wooden door with bars over it. That was the local jail, I think, and ah, he was trying to question me, and he was bringing these kids in. They were young children. Ten, eleven years old. And they could speak English. And they would ask me questions and they would tell stories that they had picked up the night before or the day before, they had picked up some Russian??

Paul He wanted to know how I escaped or what have you and I wouldn't tell him. And then I think I was there two days. And that was the time this kid wanted to practice his English. And so he spent quite a bit of his time, one of the kids did down there when he was out of school. Trying to practice his English. Then they sent a fellow out, a guard out from 7A. He brought me in and one of the things I remember going back on the local train. He wasn't interested in me a dad gum bit. There was girls on the train. And he was interested in all the girls.

Chuck Well that's those soldiers.

Paul So we got back in there, and I think we must have got back in the afternoon or something like that, anyway they had the table and the officer and they had me and all the nationalities that they had lined up for ah and I still had the compass with me.

Chuck That's why we lost the compass!

Paul And they had some British and I don't know what their offenses really was. It wasn't escape. But anyway this guy was running us through, and he was telling us how many days we got. He didn't question me a bit. But I had the compass and they were searching them as they went in, just before they got to him. And there was an Aussie there or an Aussie-English, I'm not really sure, and I thought, as he was going by, I'm going to pass it to you, and I tossed the compass as I remember. I know I got it back.

Paul He gave me I think it was ten days.

Virginia Which was quite a bit.

Paul Down there, and they took me on down, now it wasn't as I remember the boob. Now there were no bunks.

Chuck No, you slept on the floor.

Rusty Right.

Paul There were no blankets as I remember.

Chuck There was some straw palley-asses that to me were about that thick.

Paul The might had been something like pallets.

Chuck They were something like burlap and about that wide. And maybe six feet long.

Paul I just remember that it was awfully hard sleeping.

Chuck It was.

Paul And I remember the telephone. And I remember that ah, the thing that got me on to Saltz, was the fact that, these guys were telling me how much was coming through to me and I wasn't getting it!

Paul I found when I came out of there, they were having a little election up there, and there was only one end of the barracks and thirty or forty or fifty I don't know Americans in it. And they were electing officers. Guys were doing different things. Somebody nominated Saltz and I said No!

Chuck You said No!

Paul No! When this guy goes down there high grading stuff that we were supposed to be getting. I'm sure not going to stand by while you elect him.

Chuck To anything!

Paul And that was the last that I remember of Saltz. I know he was around but that was the last I heard of him.

Chuck Well I don't know how I got that, maybe you told me through the fence that the sucker was doing it or something because I really read him off through the fence and I scared him a little bit. I never did catch him after I got out.

Virginia Well Rusty how many days do you think you were out?

Rusty I figured we were out eight days.

Virginia Eight days.

Rusty Yeah. And ah. And when we got a notice to apply for money from the frozen German assets in this country. I collected \$844. But down at the bottom of the page it says that nine days have been deducted from your total time because you were not under enemy control at that time. So instead of getting 853, I got 844 because we were loose.

Paul I got the whole \$854.

Chuck Did you? I got some money but I don't know what the days were.

Paul I remember exactly 854.

Rusty I got 844 less 9 days.

Chuck Well see he remembers things like that but all I did was take the check and spend the money. The last \$40 we bought an electric blanket with. Do you remember that? We were up where it was 40 below zero all winter along and boy that was the best thing that we ever had.

Rusty Do you know there is one thing that I remember about 7A. Do you remember when they would delouse our barracks and put the cyanide gas in? And then leave it in over night and then open it up and air it out for three days before they would let us back in? And one time with the Russians, they put the cyanide gas in, in the morning and opened it up and put the guys back in that night?

Chuck Is that right?

Rusty And the next morning the whole barracks was dead? Do you recall that?

Chuck I remember a little about that. But I thought it was their whiskey that they were drinking. Do you remember them coming in the barracks in 7A? I don't remember whether we had numbered barracks or what. There weren't that many barracks full of us. But anyway these Russians come through selling vodka that they had made in their barracks from potatoes. And I don't know, I think I gave them a cigarette and I got, not very much something like that and it tasted just like, oh gee whiz something like high test gas or something, you know it was bad! and I thought well, I think that will work in a cigarette lighter. And I had an old Zippo and I poured it in there and man, it worked good! Where gasoline would only flame like that would come up like that and I mean light up a cigar.

Rusty I remember when the other nationalities would be coming off of their work details. They'd flip their cigarette butts over to us.

Chuck Uh hah.

Rusty Do you remember that? I went all through the war and never quit smoking. The whole time. Bumming cigarettes, where I could. When I didn't have any. Using those Polish cigarettes. They would tear your lungs out?

Chuck Oh, they were awful, they were terrible.

Rusty And uh, I remember them flipping their cigarettes.

Chuck I remember those dumb English ones. That always tasted like they had salt in them. I don't know what was the matter with a Canadian or English cigarette but it always tasted like you were burning salt! I figured they put them in the damned hold of a ship and they got washed all the way over you know and they dried em out and sold them to you.

Rusty I remember that in 7A one time we tried to make soup out of blood sausage. All we ended up with was a damned bunch of blood.

Chuck Globs floating around in there. I couldn't go that either.

Rusty We found teeth and fingernails.

Chuck Hair? We found lots of hair. Little globs of hair.

Virginia Do you remember them eating horse meat?

Rusty Oh! Hell! I remember them bringing a tub of soup into our barracks 17A and it had the damned horse eye in it. Do you remember the horse eye floating around in it?

Chuck We had horse hair and parts of hide. And I know it was tails off of the horse. You know the long hair, gee whiz! It was real coarse hair. In fact I got a bunch of it and let it dry out and braided a watch strap out of it. We didn't eat it, but the macaroni was half shell or whatever it was, and the red stuff, I didn't know what it was but I figured it was tomatoes, and then there were lots of little crawly worms, that were dead in there, little maggots, but that was pretty good soup though, that was about the best soup they sent us.

Rusty Yeah. Well I remember, one of the guards said that the work parties got the food. If a horse broke its leg, we got the head. We got the head and the legs. And the work parties got the rest of the carcass with the meat on it. Because we were non-productive.

Chuck Yeah, we weren't doing nothing.

Paul Do you remember when they brought all of those Italians in to 7A? You were there. All of us.

Chuck Yes! I remember.

Paul They had Marshal Patagleo in that group and the whole bunch. And that's the time that we got lots of tomato paste.

Chuck Yeah! Uh huh.

Pl They brought lot of Italian food up with them and we got potatoes, I can remember this tomato paste. I didn't have the slightest idea what this stuff was, It looked like rubber, red rubber. But after you mixed a little water and heated it up, it was darned good!

Chuck Well, I can remember from somewhere, I got tapioca, I think it was off of the black market. And it was big stuff! You know. It was like little marbles. And I thought boy I know how to, tapioca is good! So I got the stuff in a pot and I started cooking that stuff and it jelled up. And hell! I couldn't do nothing with it. I couldn't stir it. So I got it out of there and I cut it up with a knife and we made balls out of it. And that was pretty good baseballs. They lasted about three weeks. They were good! They would bounce on the floor. You know and that was tapioca. I never tried to cook tapioca after that.

Rusty Do you remember on time at 17B, when we hadn't had any red cross parcels for six or eight weeks? And we got in 42,000 rolls of toilet paper? Do you remember that?

Chuck He! He! Yeah! Yeah!

Chuck But, I got an English parcel in there from some place. I think somebody felt sorry for us.

Paul We used to get English parcels at 7A.

Chuck Mm hunh!

Paul I don't ever remember getting one at 17B.

Chuck No I don't think we did, but the English gave us some of their parcels.

Paul But they did distribute some of the English parcels to us and they had tea in them. And somewhere along the line they got some American parcels and they had coffee in them and we would trade tea for coffee. But that was a pretty good bunch of Englishmen there.

Chuck They traded a lot pretty good and the French men even.

Rusty Do you remember Andre'?

Paul Yes, I remember Andre'.

Rusty And there was one other one up there that we was close to. I have forgotten his name but ah- I sure would have liked to met up with Andre' after the war. Because he was----

Chuck Was he a great big guy?

Rusty He was a big tall guy.

Chuck He was always eying me and feeling my butt a little bit, and I was kinda worried about him. He was real good with French crackers. They had those biscuits, whatever they were. Harder than hell! Did you ever try to eat those things?

Paul If you soaked them in water, they were pretty good!

Chuck You could almost make soup out of them. But boy, trying to eat em, you just couldn't break them off hardly.

Rusty Old Andre', he treated us pretty good down there.

Chuck He was always calling me "Laddie, Laddie" you know and put his arm around me and he kind of made me.

Rusty I never had any trouble

Chuck Didn't you?

Rusty Well, I was uglier!

Chuck I know when he got to feeling me a little bit, I thought now I am going to get away from Andre'.

Paul We were,-- I remember one time, and this was after the group went on up to the French-- gathered up several cups full of these crackers, and brought em up for us to distribute.

Chuck Well that's all that they got! From what I understood, that's what they got from their government was those crackers. And that's what they got.

Paul And it was a heck of a gift.

Chuck And it was out of their own larder, you might say because they all worked, I don't think they were exempt.

Rusty No! They were required to work according to the Geneva Convention. Chuck They weren't non-coms or there weren't any there I don't know which.

Rusty Because even the sergeants, even Andre', I think worked, except that he had enough influence if he wanted to do a particular job.

Chuck He had been there!

Rusty Oh Hell.

Chuck He said he had gone back to France a couple of times. To see his family or Christmas or Thanksgiving and then they would ship him back. He was that much of an honor prisoner of some kind, because I know that he told me, he said "if you will stay with me, I will get you to France" and I thought I don't know if I can stand him, going to France or not, but he worried me a little bit, Nice guy! really was, he was----

Rusty I remember he tried to, everyone of us, I think, always thought of escape, and I asked him if I ever got to France, I said how would I let the people know and he said just say "Je suis prisonnier de guerre" (I am a prisoner of war) and I didn't know what the hell it meant, I knew it meant war and prisoner, but ah, he said that's all you have to know, if you get to the right people, you are on your way home.

Chuck Well when you guys got shot down, you didn't get to contact any natives or anything did you?

Paul Well, I was shot down and we were hit bombing shipping at "Sfax Harbor?" We were quite a ways back on our way back before we lost an engine, and we were quite a ways back before the rudder control cable failed on us. And we were too high and we went into a kind of flat spin and the pilot, he just shut the power off and was able to straighten it up and land out there in the desert. And that was fortunate for us. We landed and the Arabs came over, and they made sure that we didn't go any where, because ah the Germans showed up the next day, in a truck and took us into Sfax and then Tunis.

Chuck Was your whole crew, was all right?

Paul Our whole crew, none of us were injured. The only injury, was mine and it wasn't due to enemy fire but was due the fact that I was laying on this plate of, this armor plate, there were two pieces there, buckled up and came apart and I was holding on to that gun handle sticking out the bottom of the plane and I shouldn't have been, and it just you know it just kind of wrecked my right arm for a while, just the shock of it, so-- and that's when I lost my canteen, because this armor plate came apart and buckled up, and then came back together and my canteen dropped right in the middle and I

couldn't get it out. So the pilot did an extremely good job. The last I remember him saying before we hit the ground was "Pick up your feet Jimmey, I'll try not to push too much sand in there!" And so he did an excellent job bringing us down.

Chuck Calm and collected crashing an airplane. Did you land with your wheels up?

Paul Oh no! No, No. He bellied it in!

Chuck He bellied it in?

Paul Course if he hadn't of bellied it. Well he didn't have no power anyway to get the wheels down! He didn't have time to get the wheels down. And if he had of gotten the wheels down, we probably wouldn't have made it because of that soft sand, that we hit in. And so we were fortunate.

Chuck Well, did you jump out of yours, Rusty?

Rusty Oh no! No We set ours down. We were coming down. Lost our power on two engines out and then the other two, they couldn't get rpm's out them and we were coming into mountains, and the pilot called the navigator and says "Where are we?" And the navigator took a fix and he said (whatever it was- longitude and latitude), whatever it was, we were supposed to be 300 miles behind our own lines. And the pilot said, "Well, we'll set it down here then, and in the morning radio in, we are under radio silence. We can radio in and get some parts out here, and get this thing off the ground." And so that night the pilot had checked out the the rest of the crew that morning at briefing. So the navigator didn't have a time check. And that night the stars came out, he took a celestial and found out we were 50 miles behind German lines. And we were supposed to be 300 the other way. The navigators watch was off enough to make that much difference. And that had to be six or seven minutes as I understand it. I don't know if that's right or not but any rate, we set it down in the desert and of course when the thing hit, (the wheels were down and everything) the wheels were right up to the hubs in sand. And ah, We stayed there that night. We had some kind of rations or some damned thing. And anyhow we stayed there that night. And Smitty and I, the guy that's here now, all night long, we brought the bomb sight back into the radio room. Smitty and I sat there all night long, with our rifles, ready to shoot that bomb sight. There's three places, you had to shoot the Norden bomb sight to destroy it.

Chuck To destroy it so they didn't get it.

Rusty And so we sat there all damned night long, the rest of the guys were half asleep you know and Smitty and I would spell each other out, we got ten of fifteen minutes of sleep you know and we had drained out a bucket of gasoline and had set it back by the waist guns and set the flare pistol there, and if anything happened, the last guy out was going to kick over the bucket of gasoline and fire the flare pistol into it. So the next morning, the pilot and co-pilot and the navigator, they went off ahead of the plane to see if they could find a hard spot in the desert where if they got this thing running again, we might be able to take off.

Chuck Mm hm.

Rusty And ah, while they were gone, an ME 109 started making passes at us, they weren't firing, it was just reconnaissance, they kept buzzing closer and closer all the time you know, and the bombardier was in charge of the crew. Smitty and I were the ones that were left in the airplane, the bombardier and the other guys were out scouting around for whatever, I don't remember what the hell they were doing outside. But at any rate this ME 109 started to buzz us, and Holmstrum, the bombardier- We had landed, a couple hundred yards from a hard-topped road! There were holes dug along the side of the road for ditching trucks because the P-38's used to come in across there, when they were running German convoys down through there, and they would strafe the convoys down there. So they had these big holes dug beside the road for ditching the trucks. So Holmstrum and the other guys, except the pilot and co-pilot, were out looking for a hard spot.

Chuck A landing strip in the desert.

Rusty These guys jumped down in one of these holes when the ME 109's started to buzz us. Smitty and I were still sitting there in the damned radio room were ready to shoot the bomb sight. Holmstrum said, "Rusty! Smitty! Get the hell out of there!" And we said "What about the bomb-sight?" "Get out of there! The hell with the bomb-sight get out of there", so Smitty and I still had our rifles. The rest of the guys, they were un-armed. This ME 109, he would make a pass you know and, Smitty would say "Are you ready?" "Yeah" Bang! We were shooting at the damned thing with a rifle! I don't know how many rounds we shot off at that thing. He made a quite a few passes. You only had time to get one shot, and that was it!

Chuck One shot.

Rusty We probably missed that thing by three quarters of a mile. Any way Smitty and I had gone to the hole right directly ahead of the airplane. And the other guy's were a little bit to the North. After we got our shots fired off and this ME 109 was making a last pass and we heard motors. Truck engines. Motor cycles. Two motor cycles. Coming down the road. And pretty soon, Smitty and I, we were going to stick it out to the last end, you know! So pretty soon the bombardier said "All right! Rusty and Smitty, come on out!" And Smitty and I stuck our heads over the sides and "bbt", a little burst of machine gun, you know sub-machine gunfire, those little Tommy guns that they had, because we had our rifles and every thing! We didn't know, you are not supposed to get sand in your rifle. Right?

Paul No! You don't!

Rusty You never drop your rifle in the sand! After Holmstrum called us the second time, we came up out of the hole, and as I said, we didn't drop our damned rifles! And we got another little burst of machine-gun fire at our feet, and we knew right away that we had to do something! So, we dropped our rifles!

Chuck You got rid of your rifles!

Rusty We got sand in them!

Chuck Even if you got sand in them!

Rusty So we dropped the rifles. They marched us, they had some trucks near-by! We were so close to a gun emplacement up in the mountains! They said "We knew you weren't going any place! We could have come out yesterday and got you guys! You weren't going any place." And they were sitting up there with an 88 trained on us! If we had of made a move, or if they would have got the thing started.

Paul If you had of made a move, you would have been in trouble, wouldn't you?

Rusty Yeah! They would have just hit the plane with an 88, you know, those guys were pretty good with those things! They could hit a mosquito with an 88!

Chuck You bet! Yeah! Sure!

Rusty They marched us five or six miles. We had on those damned leather flying suits you know. The sheep wool sheepskin flying suits.

Chuck The sheep ones! Gee! Those were hot!

Rusty And the boots and the helmets and the whole bit! And we walked across the desert with those things on and we were about to melt!

Chuck I can imagine!

Rusty And finally we caught up to a place where they had an empty truck, and they took us from there and on in to Tunis. I don't know, when were you in Tunis?

Paul Well, I was in Tunis on probably January the second and third or maybe the fourth--

Rusty Well then, we were there at the same time! Because we come into Tunis into the city jail, I think it was the city jail or an army one-- I don't know, but at any rate we were in the jail there in Tunis. Got in there on the fourth!

Paul Yeah! Well I'll be darned.

Rusty Did they fly you across in those old tri-motor Junkers?

Paul Yeah! Yeah. Yeah. They took ah, they took me to the hospital, and they took the pilot to the hospital. The reason they took the pilot to the hospital was he was allergic to flea bites, he was just swelled up like nobody's business!

Chuck He was swelled up to his toes!

Paul With flea bites from that night we had spent with the Arabs!

Chuck You had them camel fleas didn't you?

Paul Oh, we were all flea bitten! But I mean he was really bad! It had poisoned him. So they took us to a hospital in Tunis. And they patched up my arm, it didn't need much patching just mainly I needed a sling.

Chuck Sling and a hang on.

Paul Yeah. They looked me over. There were no broken bones, so I was all right. The pilot, they doped him up, and patched up both arms! Ha! Ha! Both arms! He was wrapped from ---all the way down!

Chuck All the way down!

Paul And then they threw us in a cell there and-- It was, I don't know whether it was ----, lets see? this was the Italians that did this, not the Germans. The Italians took us into Sfax. That's where they turned us over to, and we stayed in the Italian place for a night or two and then they turned us over to the Germans, and we went to Tunis, and that's where they took us to the hospital. In Tunis. I think it was about the 3rd or 4th, something like that, of January. It wasn't but a day or two, it was right away that they flew us across to Naples. In the Junkers 52.

Rusty Yeah. Well they told us that they used to wait until they had enough to make a flight of about a hundred. Because the only machine gun they had was a bicycle turret, with a thirty caliber machine gun on it.

Paul One guy! One gunner on it!

Rusty One gunner.