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In the gray pre-dawn light of July 25, 1941, six Bristol Beauforts of 217 Squadron, Coastal Command, warmed up on the airfield at RAF St. Eval in Cornwall. At 5:30 am, weighed down with bulky landmines that stuck out beyond their bomb doors, the twin-engined bombers rumbled down the runway one by one and clambered into the sky. The crews scanned the horizon with some anxiety. It promised to be a clear day, and they needed cloud cover for the operation ahead of them. They were due to rendezvous with torpedo carrying Beauforts from 22 Squadron - their orders to find and attack the battleship Scharnhorst, surely one of the most dangerous ships on the sea at that time.

At 38,400 tons full load the Scharnhorst was at that time one of the largest and most heavily armed warships in the German fleet. She was a foe they had faced before. Two nights earlier 217 Squadron Beauforts had bombed her at La Pallice. The previous night Bomber Command had attacked her and scored hits. Now the Scharnhorst, escorted by six destroyers, was somewhere in the Bay of Biscay, making a dash for the safety of Brest harbor, its guns, and its repair facilities.

The following excerpts, taken from a longer memoir, describe the events of that day as witnessed by my father, Pilot Officer Jim Hunter, aged 21. He was the observer (navigator/bomb aimer) of the leading Beaufort, piloted by Squadron Leader Les Collings, known affectionately as 'Digger' because he was Australian. The wireless operator (W/Op) that day was Sgt. Pip Appleby, and Sgt. Ted Taylor was the air gunner (A/G). Both sergeants could do either task, and alternated positions for each flight.

The Bristol Beaufort was a bomber designed to double as a torpedo attack aircraft. It was handsome to look at but underpowered and hard to fly. It had also suffered disastrously at the hands of enemy fighters during daylight raids, all facts of which the crew was well aware that morning.

Jim Hunter recorded that day's events on three small pieces of paper, which he kept safe from prying German eyes throughout the time he spent as a prisoner of war. In 1945 he pasted the pages into his Flying Log book, noting that this particular operational flight had lasted three years, nine months, fifteen days, seven hours and 27 minutes. The log book and his small blue watercolor album, in which he had recorded scenes of prisoner of war life, together with the pages of his war diary, remained on a shelf until he began to write the events in narrative form in 1980.

The St. Eval Beauforts had originally been detailed to attack the six escorting destroyers with semi-armor piercing (S.A.P.) bombs, creating a

diversion, while the torpedo carrying Beauports from 22 Squadron went for the Scharnhorst itself. Then the plan was changed - the diversionary force was to attack as before, but using landmines. If they became separated from the rest of the force each aircraft was to attack only the Scharnhorst. A landmine meant a much lower, slower, and more dangerous approach, with a weapon that was almost impossible to aim. It also meant that the mine would be next to useless for an attack on the battleship if that should be necessary, since it had no armor-piercing capability. The crews were well aware of this, and Jim's crew knew that since they had not seen any other supporting aircraft they were expected to carry out an attack that had little chance of any success.

The British spelling and punctuation of the original has been retained.



The W/Op and Gunner were already aboard and sorting themselves out; Pip was assembling his box of tricks in the W/Op's compartment and Ted was busy-ing himself polishing the perspex in his turret for, as he would say, 'If you can't see 'em you can't hit 'em.' The skipper and I did the usual tour around the outside of the aircraft and I made a point of inspecting the bomb bay primarily to check that the arming pins, so far as one could see with a landmine, were in place in the fuses. A mine carried three in the nose and three more in the tail. Technically, nothing happens to a mine until the arming pins are withdrawn and the fuse is free to operate by dint of the wind turning the little propeller to allow a striker to explode the detonator on impact. Whilst they're in place it's quite safe, although I do remember an occasion when we were diverted to Chivenor and one crew, Sergeants Holliday, Whadcoat and their Wop/Ag's had a hung-up mine aboard. The next day we set out for base and we were in the lead. The weather was fine and the flight was no more than thirty minutes. Some five or six minutes into the flight the aircraft behind us just blew up and, so far as I know, the reason for that was never determined. It was assumed that their mine had exploded but it is difficult to imagine a crew taking off without ensuring the pins were intact.

SETTLING-IN

Digger went first up the ladder into the aircraft - there was scarcely room to pass in the fuselage until he had scrambled into the cockpit. I could then crawl into my glasshouse in the nose. It would have been a whole lot easier to have

climbed in through the nose had we not been armed with what was known as a 'scaregun', a Browning mounted on the floor and pointing backwards. This could be quite a useful piece of kit in an encounter with another aircraft on any other occasion. Today, however, it would be of no use at all, at least on the outward leg; its angle of deflection was only slight and the chances are that the first shot (and the last!) would hit the projecting landmine! On the other hand it could well come in handy on the return flight should we encounter any nasties.

As the pilot checked around his cockpit I began installing my odds and ends in the navigator's compartment. First of all I had to get rid of the most bulky stuff - my parachute, which occupied a slot on the starboard behind the seat - then to arrange everything around me in its accustomed place. It required a little discipline because without it there was always the risk of some item finding its way to the floor and thence to disappear for ever down the cartridge case chute into the sea and beyond! Having done what was necessary I'd poke my head round to the cockpit to see how Digger was doing. Most things seemed to be where they should be so far as he was concerned and he was just placing his "crib sheet" of headings, times and distances, which I'd prepared for him to enable him to keep track on our progress, above the combing above the instrument panel. Last came his packet of cigarettes. We were in good time with even several minutes in hand before start up. This was just as well since we should be the first to go.

The grey light of dawn had now given way to a yellowish sky - the portents of a fine day to follow. I'm sure we all hoped there would be just a little cloud in the target area, say 5/8th at around 3,000 feet. That would do nicely.

TIME TO GO

All was very quiet until the skipper's voice over the intercom announced, "Time to go - final check" to which we reported in turn and waited. The ground crew who had been in position for some time beside the trolley-ac and chocks waited for the skipper's signal to start-up. The port engine started nicely with the usual cloud of exhaust smoke and purple flames from the rich mixture lapping over the wing's leading edge. The engine was set at fast idle while the same procedure was used for the starboard engine. This was a shade more reticent and required a little more encouragement but it too soon fired with a slightly better display of purple flame. The propeller gathered speed to keep time with the other until the temperatures and pressures for both engines reached the normal. Then the engines would be run up and the pitch operation of the propeller actuated and the magnetos checked for serviceability. Then back to fast idle once more to await the "green" from the caravan at the other end of the field.

When I was a lad at school my brother Don and I would cycle to Kenley airfield to watch the Hawker Harts and Bristol Bulldogs taking off and landing. We'd park our bikes and lie on the ground at the edge of the field and watch as they

soared over our heads. We would talk about aeroplanes and what fun it would be to fly... Today, I doubt if there was a soul who cared what was going on or where we were going. At 5.30 precisely we led the squadron take-off, which from a spectator's viewpoint was no great deal - simply six Beauforts following one another at short intervals into the morning air of the Cornish countryside.

There's nothing to compare with the last minute preparation, the orderly drill up to the gathering roar of the engines as they are taken up to full power for take-off and the final lurch forward of the aeroplane. Another thing is the smell of an aeroplane (not a modern airliner, naturally). Piston engined military aircraft in particular always have the all-pervading odour of 100 octane fuel. Add to this the smell of various lubricants and, especially at start up, the exhaust gases and one has an environment which, I think, defies description. It's not objectionable; it's almost homely, something which stays in one's mind for a long time. It's not till the windows are closed and the aircraft gathers speed on take-off that the air clears and all that's left is a memory - as of a fading perfume.

So. Ready to go and time for my usual silent prayer - "Please God take us safely into the air and back to land at the end of our operation".

For take-off the throttles were advanced with considerable caution in order to avoid any swing occurring as we accelerated across the bumpy field. Digger was pretty experienced on this aircraft and au fait with most, if not all, of its characteristics so the trip across the airfield was very orderly. The Observer sat in the second pilot's seat (not that we ever carried a second pilot) for take-off with his feet braced against the base of the instrument panel for there were no straps fitted. Then as the airspeed built up to 100 knots and we became airborne at the second bounce I'd take up my position in the nose. The neat lines of hedgerows beneath us were receding rapidly and the sea came quickly into view. It was calm and there was little wind or drift as we reached 2,000 feet - the altitude for the first leg. It appeared to be getting quite warm when the skipper said that the heating was in one of its "all" positions. That is, it was either all on or all off. Whoever decided to put those heating controls where they were must have had a great sense of humour - almost as great as the chap who designed them! However, by means of a deft shove with the right foot the status quo was restored.

SET COURSE TARGET

In company with the other five we were on our way, each to attack one of the destroyers. Or, should we not rendezvous as planned, we would attack the main target itself. Having passed the first heading to the pilot he made a gentle banking turn to port to take us more or less down the coast and overland towards the Lizard. Then we'd fly out to sea before heading in a south easterly direction from which we would begin our planned interception. By so doing we

hoped to have a fair degree of coverage in our search for and interception of our prey. Apart from the occasional fishing vessel there was very little going on. The cloud began to appear and we dropped down beneath it to maintain contact with the sea. Ted, in the turret, could see nothing of the rest of the squadron but we hoped to catch a glimpse of one or two of them as we altered course onto our next heading. Pip, on the other hand was, as usual, doing his accustomed act of juggling with the coils and checking out the various frequencies. He was quite safe doing this because we would be unlikely to be making any transmissions yet awhile.

There was something special about being airborne. It was exhilarating. As a crew we always adhered to a strict discipline, no talk or chatter except about those things which directly concerned our task in hand. When on long sea patrols I would often have a yen to sing - only to myself, you understand. Should the microphone get itself switched on during one of these sessions one would be left in no doubt whatever by the rest of the crew who were not particularly musically inclined! On this occasion, however, there was not too much time to spare for such luxuries. Digger, on the other hand, seemed to find more solace in a cigarette, which at our altitude was no problem for the oxygen mask was usually hanging loose. Whatever we did I'm sure it bore little resemblance to scenes portrayed on films of ops. We just did not chatter or jump up and down with excitement. Most of the conversation concerned headings, distances and times, changes in altitude, airspeed or any other variations which affected the situation. The wireless op would pass me any bearings I might ask for and relay any message he would receive, whilst the air gunner would be left in his solitary splendour of loneliness and discomfort in the turret. We made a point, however, of bringing him into the conversation whenever possible. Fortunately our trips were seldom very long, four or five hours, and it was seldom cold. And if it was we in the sharp end could always try putting the heating to its 'all-on' position.

EN ROUTE

We'd been airborne for about an hour and there was still no sign of the rest of the squadron. We were accustomed to operating alone but this time we should have been surrounded by folk we knew. One thought did strike me, however, that our compass could be in error, but both the pilot's and mine agreed - and I knew my plotting was correct. Even so, it's a nasty feeling to be the only one in step! If this trip was to be the success we hoped it was imperative that we should all be in approximately the same air space at the same time. Even Digger had a feeling of being alone when he asked me to check our last heading. We came to the conclusion that the others were obscured by the morning mist. We'd surely pick them up later but for the moment their company was rather academic. The cloud was continuing to lower and rain was beginning to splatter the perspex so

we went a little lower to get underneath it. There was also a bit of drift which confirmed the met man's forecast of a small front. We altered course to maintain track and increased airspeed to achieve our planned groundspeed. All the while the pilot was flying manually. This was not at all unusual. George [the automatic pilot] was not the most predictable of assistants at the best of times, and at low level he would be an absolute disaster. This meant that this trip, and all like it, was very demanding on the pilot and without accurate flying and close co-operation between pilot and navigator the little mathematical exercises I was hoping to achieve could not possibly succeed.

The weather was definitely deteriorating and getting rather more turbulent. Visibility was now less than a mile but since there was still some time to go to our ETA over the target we were not unduly concerned. Once through this band of turbulence and rain we again entered a comparatively clear patch. Furthermore my calculations showed the wind to be dropping and small patches of low stratus were beginning to appear. As we progressed and neared the target area blankets of sea fog were noticeable. Seeing this, Digger warned the crew to keep a close look-out. There was now only some seven minutes before ETA, we were at around 500 feet and being alternately engulfed in fog and then exposed to clear air.

FIRST SIGHT

Two minutes before our ETA there was a call from Ted in the turret to say there were some "large ripples" on the port side. Digger immediately climbed a little and banked to port. Sure enough, between the patches of fog could be seen without any doubt a large ominous wake. And just ahead of this was a huge dark form whose outline was still obscured. Of one thing I was certain. It had to be our quarry but so very much larger than I'd expected. Once before, when the Scharnhorst was docked at Brest, we'd come pretty close to her when we were laying mines in the harbour. There she looked awfully large. But now....

THE SCHARNHORST

Plotting and log keeping played no part in what followed. ... "Bomb doors open. Arming switches on," I told the pilot as I placed the line of switches on my right to the "on" position. These would withdraw the pins from the safety devices as soon as the mine was released. We were all on the look-out for the rest of the squadron and/or the torpedo squadron who were supposed to have first crack, so to speak.

Normally I'd be manipulating the bombsight by setting on whatever wind there was, adjusting the height bar to our altimeter height, setting the bombs' terminal velocity, trying to align the verge ring with the compass needle, levelling the bomb-sight and guiding the aircraft onto the target. Keeping 'red on red'

was almost impossible to achieve; during evasive action there would be a certain amount of swirl set up in the compass bowl which would give a false reading of our direction. Even the height setting would only be an approximation by virtue of the errors in the aneroid altimeter and not knowing what the barometric pressures were in the area. The only component one could set with any degree of accuracy would be the T.V. [terminal velocity] of the bombs, provided we were high enough. All this I was spared on this occasion for I don't think anyone had bothered to calculate the T.V. of a paving stone, for that was the thing to which a landmine was usually likened. From our altitude the bomb-sight was almost superfluous, even though there was a device mounted on the drift wires which we were supposed to use for low level bombing. But we had devised a means of low level bombing by using marks on the perspex as the foresight and resting the chin on the top of the height bar. Nevertheless we would certainly do our best. There was little point in coming this far only to make a mess of things.

ATTACK

The Scharnhorst was, without doubt, somewhere at the start of the wake we had seen earlier and, no doubt, she would now be aware of our presence both from the noise of our engines and from her radar responses. They could, in all probability, have seen us. With calm deliberation Digger guided the aircraft along the line of the wake as far as I was able to tell him, for the sea was, for the most part, still shrouded in mist or fog. We gained a little height and were now at a few hundred feet which, if all went well, would be the height of release of our load. The sea was by this time becoming quite agitated and white foam could be distinguished here and there. Soon there appeared to be a dark area beneath the mist and out ahead to which I did my best to direct the pilot. Whether this elusive ogre was the Scharnhorst or one of the ships escorting her was, at this stage, impossible to tell. Whatever it was we must attack it for the chances of making a second run were a bit slim. The skipper began a gentle turn. We wanted to attack from behind to cross her bows diagonally. Murphy's law dictated otherwise for she was by now completely obscured by fog. In an instant she had disappeared until we were immediately above her bows when she appeared big and large. To release our mine at this point would have meant a large overshoot so, without another word Digger began to go round again in order to return to where we'd last seen her. For the present she was lost from sight but we continued to turn until we estimated we should be on a parallel track. Sure as eggs we were on a parallel heading but this time on the ship's starboard side and in a perfectly clear patch of sky. The engines were at full throttle and the props in fine pitch as I began to give the skipper directions for another attempt. We began to turn towards her. Suddenly the aircraft gave a distinct shudder and smoke

began to appear from the port engine. There was also some smoke coming from behind the pilot, or so it seemed, as it came into the nose. I was still trying to align the target with the marks on the perspex by giving directions to Digger. But it was soon apparent that things weren't going as they should for, despite my directions, we were turning only slightly and at the same time descending. We had lost our inter-com and no amount of turning would enable us to attack on this run either. We would pass way over to starboard. It was at this time that I took a quick peek over my shoulder into the cockpit. We had no communications between us but I could see that Digger had problems as he held the column back and to port. The port engine was still in fine pitch and over revving as it continued to issue smoke in large quantities.

DITCHING

The skipper must have realised that there was little hope of our being able to reach the target and drop our landmine so at that point he pulled the jettison toggle. The aircraft breathed a sigh of relief as it leapt a few feet into the air before relapsing into its former unhappy state. Although I had a course ready to give the pilot for him to steer to reach home - the normal procedure when leaving the target area - I had my doubts whether Digger could do much about it. What was at once evident was the fact that we were now being hit repeatedly. There was a fire somewhere aft of the main spar so I collected a fire-extinguisher and went to see. The W/Op's cabin had been badly hit and poor Pip was in a shocking state. He must have been killed in an instant. There was little I could do to help him so, on impulse, I switched the IFF [Identify Friend or Foe signal] fully clockwise and clamped the morse key down as we'd been instructed, with the intention of sending a signal which, if base were listening, would alert them to where the target was, or at least enable them to get a bearing. In retrospect, however, I doubt whether any part of the radio was serviceable for everything seemed such a shambles and Pip was in the middle of it all. I was obviously superfluous there so I attempted to return to the front of the aircraft. From the side window I saw the starboard undercarriage wheel hanging limply down beneath a smoking engine which, however, was still operating. And Digger was still hauling back on the control column. By this time we were not far off the sea but descending very gently. A lot of wind was finding its way in through the nose, my office, which had been partly shot away. Beyond that point I have no clear recollection of what took place except I remember bracing my feet in the usual way against the instrument panel - the emergency ditching position, or one of them. The optimum position was to brace against the main spar but at this stage of the game that was a long way back. Pip had no longer any need to take such precautions. As for Ted we had no idea how he was faring. In normal circumstances he says the drill would be 'to centralise the turret and pray'. Fortunately he had the pres-

ence of mind, and the good fortune, to be able to operate the turret manually and at just the critical moment to enable him to exit the turret into the sea.

INTO THE DRINK

That ditching was something to be wondered at. Little short of a miracle. Digger must have used every bit of flying skill he ever possessed to make such a copy book ditching. And if one takes into account the state of the engines - one on fire and in full power whilst the other was seemingly sick and out of control. And, into the bargain, he had also collected a certain amount of shrapnel during the process. It can only be assumed that somewhere there was someone keeping a close eye on things.

Everything became so very quiet. By God it was quiet after the previous din. Digger was then making his way out through the hatch above his cockpit and I soon followed. The last ridiculous thing I remembered doing before I left was to lift the Syko [radio encoding] machine over the side of the depleted nose into the sea! Within seconds of our entering the sea Ted appeared from the turret and had apparently suffered no real harm. The pity was that Pip didn't make it. We had to leave him in the aircraft, which took no time in sinking with her back broken and without trace. The three of us trod water and inflated our Mae Wests and waited for something to happen.

WE'RE RESCUED

We saw the battleship and some other craft in the distance and we noticed the Scharnhorst even had her gangway down. There was another aircraft somewhere overhead, but it was certainly not a Beaufort. When we did see it we realised it was a Heinkel, probably a 115, and most probably from the Scharnhorst. After a while, I do not know how long, there was a largish ship heading towards us. With a few deft movements and with the aid of a sailor wielding a boat-hook in the stern, we were towed away some distance and then hauled aboard; we were very subdued and full of water. Once aboard we were stood beside what appeared a hot boiler and it was not till then that we realised just how cold we were, even though the sea at the end of July is not usually that cold. We were then stripped naked and our uniforms were taken away by a band of worthies. There was precious little conversation at this time, but in due course our uniforms, quite surprisingly, were returned to us, a little scorched but dry.

Digger then came once more to the fore. He made the most senior-looking of our captors an offer. He not only suggested but made it very clear to, presumably, the captain of this vessel that he would be handsomely rewarded by the British government if he would be so kind as to take us across the channel to England. This suggestion was not so well received. In fact it was received with some very stern words which somehow escaped our complete comprehension. But we got

the gist especially when he said, “for you the war is over” - an expression we were to hear many times over in the years to come.

Stalag Luft III in Sagan is probably the most well known of all the German prisoner of war camps of World War II. Partly this is because of the enormous success of the movie “The Great Escape” which dramatized the successful digging of the tunnel ‘Harry’ out of which seventy-six airmen escaped. Fifty of these men were re-captured and machine-gunned on Hitler’s orders. Twenty-three others were returned to captivity. Just three made it back to England.

The cold-blooded shooting of recaptured officers became a cause célèbre, and after the war seventy-two of those responsible were put on trial. Twenty-one were executed, seven committed suicide, and the remainder escaped punishment or were acquitted. The viciousness of Hitler’s order gives some idea of the extent of the disruption caused to the Germans whenever there was an escape.

Events such as these seem to define the camp’s notoriety, and the ingenuity of the escapers is by now legendary. It was for example the scene of the highly successful ‘Wooden Horse’ escape, in which all three men involved reached England. That escape is described here.

In fact Stalag Luft III was a whole complex of camps, which grew from a basic plot of East and Center camps, until it eventually incorporated North, South, West and Belaria camps, all sealed off from each other; the total number of prisoners being about 16,000. Its designation ‘Luft’ indicated that this camp was for aircrew only - since airmen were thought to be especially troublesome and daring escapers who needed special monitoring.

Jim Hunter arrived at Stalag Luft III East camp, designated for RAF only, in summer 1943, from Oflag XXIIb in Schubin. Schubin had been the scene of its own great escape when forty men slipped through a tunnel dug from a cess pit. The pictures attached to this article were done by Jim in a small watercolor book, supplied by the Red Cross, which he managed to preserve throughout the war. The complete album includes scenes from all the prison camps he was in. We may choose to look at these as interesting curios, or we may wish to see that in each picture Jim is honing his draftsman’s skills, for he was to become a gifted forger of escape documents. He produced most of the documents used by Oliver Philpot, who escaped using the ‘Wooden Horse’ and made it back to England - his papers having been inspected by the secret police along the way. The picture album was, therefore, a recreation, an historical record, a training ground, and, finally a cover. Whenever there was a search and his forgery materials were dragged out Jim could quite innocently point to his album and explain away the need for his box of paints.

One thing that stands out is that there are very few people in any of the

pictures. I feel there may be several reasons for this. First of all, Jim may not have felt he was much good at drawing people. He may have felt more at ease drawing objects - some of his pictures of flowers are exquisite. Second, I cannot help but feel that his emphasis on the place rather than the people has to do with his sense that he wanted to record the physical actuality of his prison. The people, so lively, so restless, just did not belong in this cage, and to put them in any rendition would be like imprisoning them all over again.

The narrative excerpt begins as Jim describes his work as a forger.



After my earlier attempts I decided that digging holes in the sand with the risk of the whole lot caving in on one was not my forte. Instead I joined a small team of two who traded under the name of Dean and Dawson. Dean and Dawson was the name of a travel agency who operated in the city of London. Our specialisation was forgery. We operated in what was laughingly known as the canteen, a large dining room and kitchen. It was from here that the daily soup ration was issued in bulk but few, if any, would eat in the 'dining room'. We had a small room at the back, which sometimes doubled as a 'reading room'. There we were able to operate under the noses of the Germans in the adjoining goon-box and those in the kitchen. Outside the window in the space between the canteen and the perimeter wire the renowned 'Wooden Horse' operated. Now, forging was one way of getting on the escape list. That is, not everyone could or for that matter wanted to dig tunnels and since there were so many allied tasks associated with getting out of camp those taking part in, for example forging, were allocated a slot on the escape list. A long shot. We got slots which, unfortunately, never materialised.

One immediate requirement for sensible forgery was a sight of the original document and that was difficult. From our very early days as kriegies we had acquired the habit of 'finding' anything which looked useful. This could be achieved in many ways. One way was to pick the pockets of any workman who was required to do anything in camp. He would be working under guard himself, which brought the deed of acquiring down to a fine art. Suffice it to say that many's the tool and, not infrequently, document which came our way. There were many ruses employed to further our aims, including blackmail. There would be, for instance, the occasional friendly goon who during his routine of inspecting a block would be engaged in conversation by the more fluent German speakers amongst us. After a while he might be offered a cigarette

and, having smoked it in the seclusion of one of our rooms, would go on his way rejoicing. By means of a little patience this performance would be repeated a few days later. Chocolate could also be used in this way. Having got his confidence and discovered how best he could help us the question would be put. We only wanted to borrow things! But some things were more difficult than others; typing took a lot of persuasion as did photographs for identity cards. There was one classic event when the Germans had us on the parade ground for identity checking and for finger printing. They had set up a table with their files etc., and each of us in turn had to be checked and fingerprinted. Initially this all went well for them but having once 'been done' the officer in charge gave us to understand that we were more or less free to wander about. And since everything was going according to plan he decided to leave the corporal in charge. About half way through this procedure the football, which had appeared and with which we had been fooling about, somehow found its way to the tables on which rested the Germans' paraphernalia! Naturally we did our best to help! We cursed those who had kicked the football, of course, and helped to pick up all those cards which had become so mixed up. We'd even salvaged the camera which, in a trice, was whisked away to photograph a potential escapee. So far so good. But we needed the printed photograph so we had to do a little barter, something on the lines of a roll of film and the use of the camera on some future occasion together with the required prints in exchange for the returned camera. That was a very reasonable exchange we thought. So, apart from the forgery itself a lot of other skills were brought into play! The Germans, if caught helping us, stood a very good chance of being posted to the Eastern front - a fact we had often to remind them of.

Roger Simmons was a 'natural' for Dean and Dawson since his ambition was to become an architect. When I told him about my 'hobby' he gladly joined. He had an extremely neat and steady hand and was probably the best of us all. Now we were five; Bushy Shore was the boss (he was in a Bank before the war), then came Claud, previously a salesman, Pritchard, myself and now Roger. Quite a merry team who were taken care of by a number of 'stooges' who did the keeping watch for us. We worked whenever the situation would allow having taken precautions against a surprise intrusion by having a 'choir' on hand or a play rehearsal group ready to spring into action. The penalty for our passtime was the same as for 'incompetently approaching a German woman' - shooting!

Our work was, in the main, copying whatever documents we could get hold of which, as explained earlier, was with some difficulty. In addition it was necessary to improvise as in the case of letters. If a potential escapee were supposed to be travelling on business he would need letters of introduction and copies of correspondence to back up his story should he be challenged. This was the case with the documents for Ollie Philpot who with Codner and Williams escaped in

the 'Wooden Horse'. Ollie was a Pilot on a sister squadron to myself. He knew I was a member of Dean and Dawson so one day he called on me to see if I'd like to do a circuit. And so we set of to pound the circuit, as the expression had it. Soon he had explained his plan and his need for papers. He, in company with Codner and Williams had a plan, which was to build a vaulting horse on which everyone would be encouraged to exercise. This horse was to be placed outside the canteen about a third of the way between it and the perimeter wire and within full view of the goon-box. After it had been established for a short while the plan would begin in earnest. One or two people would be carried out within the box and whilst others were 'exercising' over it the chaps underneath would begin work. First, they had to construct a trap through which to enter the tunnel they would subsequently dig. The sand from the excavation would be loaded into little sacks and hung along the walls of the horse so that when the time came for Appel the workers and the sand could be carried back to the canteen. This required four strong men who should show no sign of strain as they lifted this whole contraption and its occupants from its place on the sand back into the canteen. The sand it contained had then to be distributed. There were various ways of doing this. It could be carried surreptitiously by visitors to the canteen and distributed gently over the 'playing field'. This required care since the new sand was totally different in colour from the normal surface sand. It could also be hidden above the ceiling in another block and in other ways. Anyway that was Ollie's plan. He went on to say that he would be travelling as a sales representative and as such would need letters of introduction, visiting cards etc., and could I do them for him? He would, of course need other documents such as an Identity Card and a permit to travel, which everyone required. Of course I could not hope to produce all these myself but I had time to do many, and so the plan was put to the others and work started in order to discover precisely what was required. It just so happened that by good fortune I received a stick of Chinese Ink in a parcel from home. This was ideal for making a good density ink. Pens we had but paper had to be of the right quality to simulate normal letter paper, a stiffer paper for the visiting cards etc. I have no idea how many man-hours the task took for it was very demanding and errors would often require beginning that piece again. We got some typing done through 'the good offices' of one of our tame goons which was fortunate for simulating typing was an awfully tedious business - but we managed. Such things as Identity Cards and the like posed less of a problem because they would naturally be part worn through daily use. I then came to the letter headings. These obviously had to be something professional and so embossing was necessary. This was done with the head of a pin pressed carefully against the back of the lettering in the heading of the letter. Visiting cards too needed extra care, they shouldn't be too part worn! The days and the weeks went by. Whilst we were beavering away at our lettering

the teams outside were getting so fit leaping over the horse and the tunnellers beneath were strenuously working. Their work was so hard that from time to time they had to have a day off in order to recuperate. It was during one of these days that some idiot pushed the horse over as he failed to make the jump. Good team-work prevailed and the status quo was quickly restored. From then on it became common practice very occasionally to repeat that performance so that any spying goon could see for himself that it was perfectly harmless exercise we were engaged upon!

The long and the short of all this is that Codner and Williams travelling together arrived home safely and, shortly afterwards Ollie, who travelled quite on his own reached home too. The next time I met Ollie Philpot was at a Royal British Legion meeting at which he was the speaker for that evening. I did not arrive in time to meet him before the talk began but I snuck in to hear what he had to say. I was really flattered to hear him say that 'a chap called Red Hunter had made some of his papers, and very useful they were'.

Whilst at Warburg I had begun to think semi-seriously about my future when the war came to an end. My first choice would be to remain in the RAF but tended to dismiss this mainly on the grounds that there would not be too many vacancies for Navigators and, in any case, competition would, doubtless, be pretty steep. It would be worth a try though. My second string would be a degree in Mechanical Engineering. It began at Warburg when I and a Fleet Air Arm Lieutenant Squire Clayton, a Swordfish Navigator, started to work methodically through Caunt's 'Introduction to the Infinitesimal Calculus'. That was no mean 'introduction', which we nevertheless completed albeit through a smoke haze, for Squire smoked a pipe and I cigarettes. Also in our room at the time was a Peter Bressey who was flying with Imperial Airways before the war but joined the RAF only to be shot down in the very early days. He taught me a great deal of navigation, especially astro navigation. With this I figured I'd be able to take the First Class Navigators exam when I got home. In any event these together with my work in the 'travel agency' and tin-bashing kept me very busy indeed and, since it was quite demanding, I had little time in which to think of other things. These activities were continued at Sagan where we were rather more fortunate in that we could obtain proper books for our studies. By dint of the generosity of the New Bodleian Library, and the Red Cross I got books on such things as physics and mechanics. With these, shared with others in exchange for books they'd been able to organize, one could study to some purpose. My first priority was to read for a B.Sc. Mech. Eng. In fact I was able to sit the First Year exam and, since the papers actually arrived home I was encouraged to take the Intermediate exam a little later. It just so happened, however, that we had to move camp again and I had only one paper to write.... That put paid to studies from then on as a kriegie.

Even from my early days I had a yen to make things. I've mentioned radio capacitors; the more commonplace things like mugs with handles, pans and chip-heaters (a little device consisting of a tin can within a tin can which could burn small fragments of coal from a cinder path with which to heat enough water for a brew) could all be made from the tins in which the Red Cross sent food in food parcels. But my *pieces de résistance* were steam engines. I built two: the first was a single acting affair which at best did 670 rpm. Then I built a double acting engine. This was intended to drive a boat, built by Tony Ingram, across the fire hydrant pond which was only three or four yards across but quite deep and naturally *verboten* to ourselves. The engine was a magnificent affair with a water tube boiler fired by a fat lamp. Had we been able to salvage it I'm sure it would have been a great success! As it was it blew up and found its way smartly to the bottom of the pond. It nearly came to grief sometime before all that, during its embryo stage, in fact. It was the day of the landing in France. We had heard on 'Jimmy' that the invasion was on but when it was confirmed by the German radio by "*Das Oberkommando der Wehrmacht gibt bekannt...*" that an attempted landing was driven back with heavy losses to the enemy..." There was great rejoicing! And since I was in the process of building my monster, my first reaction was to throw the whole lot out of the window. I soon retrieved it all, however, realising that I may still have time to complete the project.

Tin-bashing equipment consisted first of all of an appropriate tin and silver paper from cigarette packets. The Red Cross always managed to send cigarettes with tinfoil - and it really was tinfoil - which, if collected and compacted and afterwards heated in a suitable tin and poured into a wooden mould would make excellent solder. Then one required a source of heat. This was provided by heating the German 'margarine' to extract the water and with the aid of a wick made from something like a pyjama cord suspended in it a fairly constant flame could be made. Then, by blowing into a blowpipe projecting into the flame a hot, controllable flame could be obtained for soldering.

Alcohol played no great part in the life of a kriegie and I don't think it worried anyone that much. Nevertheless, when the opportunity presented itself certain people became quite adept at making it. Even at Warburg the enthusiasts managed to concoct a brew of kinds: at Sagan the art was brought to near perfection. When we received what we termed 'bulk issue', a supply of dried fruit which originated from, I believe, the British ambassador to Turkey, a Knatchball Hugessen as I remember. We would pool our resources, put them into a bucket and add yeast tablets and the whole lot would ferment. Whilst at Warburg this fermenting mass strained through a piece of cloth would suffice as a 'brew'. Here we were in the realms of sophistication which now required the specialist knowledge, in our block, of one Simpson to produce the final article. To his specification we built a condenser (the kind of thing we knew at school as a Liebig

condenser) which consisted of a tube from the fire extinguisher connected to a series of cans surrounded by another series of cans through which ran cold water. This was placed onto a larger can in which the mother liquor was gently boiled. The distillate was the real stuff. There was, however, a cut-off point beyond which one should not go. Boiling the whole thing to its end produced 'wood alcohol' which was not to be recommended. Before that stage the distillate was poured into bottles (supplied by the Germans and containing metal polish for which we paid *Lager Geld* or camp 'money') and, when stoppered, was buried in the sand outside the block for security. We chose bottles, rare though they were, in preference to tins for we feared that this mixture might penetrate the can before we would be able to drink it! If one were unfortunate enough to drink the last dregs of the distilled liquor it could, and did, have disastrous consequences. Bob Chadwick, who lived in the bunk above mine, had the unfortunate experience to drink some of this. Shortly after going to bed he decided to get up and get out of the window (we were always locked in at dusk) and walk to the wire. There he started to climb over. By dint of great good fortune the guard who saw him did not shoot. Instead he called the guard-room from which, in no time at all, a bevy of guards arrived to take him away. He was taken to the German sick quarters, via the cooler, from which he never again emerged into the camp. The happy part of that story is that eventually he was repatriated. It was several years later that I again saw Bob. He visited G.C.H.Q. for briefing before going to the Far East and I gave him part of that briefing. That night he stayed with me and I gave him a newspaper in the normal way. The headlines of that paper announced that a British Officer had been lost overboard from a ship travelling to the Far East. It was Bob Chadwick. The reason for this event was never discovered.

In every camp we took a fair amount of exercise quite voluntarily. It consisted for the most part of walking round and round the camp, known as doing a circuit. The usual call was 'Anyone for a circuit?' and one was never lost for a companion. We would walk round and round just chatting - after all the view was no great shakes, just pine trees and wire. There were many other forms of exercise available according to taste. Softball, the Canadian game, was very popular in the summer and the Canadian Red Cross provided the kit. We, under guidance from the Canadians, learned the game pretty well and organised leagues. Cricket, on the other hand, never did take off - only the British seemed to know the rules - and there was precious little in the way of equipment. Golf became very popular. The course was flat and all sand and, because we had no kit, we had to manufacture our own. Laying out a course was no problem; the greens were simply smoothed-out sand. Since there was no pro or shop available, ways and means had to be found to construct clubs and balls. Golf was one of those sports which required certain equipment which was not available in its true sense. The ball, for instance, was made from a marble core wound round many times, as regularly

as possible, with thread, wool and the like to the standard size and then covered with a skin of leather from an old boot, cut 'tennis-ball' fashion and sewn together with the strongest thread one could muster. Clubs were usually made from melted down water jugs and poured into a sand mould ready to be assembled onto a stick which was made from the ubiquitous bedboard.

It was not long before word reached home of 'the golf course' we had at Sagan either through letters or via the Red Cross. So it was not long before some unfortunate kriegie would receive a letter from his wife saying something to the effect that she was so pleased to hear he was able to play golf again and had, accordingly, given his clubs to some poor German PoW who was working nearby! Rather like another piece of mis-information to reach home - our swimming pool. Again, I imagine the sources must have been the same. But this 'pool' I spoke of earlier was the fire hydrant pool, three or so yards square but deep. Alongside this was a large notice saying 'kein trinkwasser', 'Baden ist verboten'. The only time I ever heard of anyone bathing in it was almost a disaster. For some reason or other a kriegie was thrown in; it was a pretty warm day anyway, but the almost unfortunate part of it was that he couldn't get out. The sloping brick surround gave him nothing onto which to hold. Someone, however, did take pity on him, eventually, and gave him a helping hand.

Letters from home, infrequent as they were for many of us proved a source of great merriment quite often. The custom was when anyone had any mail he would take it off to his bunk to read. Anything of outstanding interest which may have escaped the keen eyes of the censors was given a full airing. But when something humorous cropped up it was not unusual for the reader to leap up in his bunk and announce to the room 'listen to this'. There were such snippets as, 'Mother was right, and I've decided to marry Harry. You remember? That nice chap who used to beat you at golf'. Or someone's girl friend would write, 'I hope you're having as much fun as I am'. Another, 'I've met such a nice young Army officer'. One rather cruel remark was, 'How lucky I was not to have married a cowardly prisoner of war'. 'Do the guards teach you German?' caused some amusement too. Sometimes we'd receive photographs which we'd pin to the wall by our bunks. One surprising incident occurred when, by chance, one chap visited another for a chat and happened to notice a picture of a nice looking girl stuck to the wall saying 'She's just like my wife'. It turned out that it was (or had been) his wife who, because he'd been in the bag for so long and she hadn't heard from him decided to marry another. I think the two chaps became great friends.

Life went by without too many tragedies such as the loss of tunnels or equipment for some time. But, on 24th March 1944 we had a serious jolt. The German Commandant came to the camp with a large number of guards. He went straight to the room of the S.B.O., Group Captain Dickie Kellett, whilst

the guards shouted to us to go out side for *Appell*. When we'd assembled in our usual dishevelled manner the German officer and the S.B.O. came on the scene. This was a most unusual event and could only bode ill. And, sure enough it did. The SBO had to tell us that 50 British Officers had been shot 'attempting to escape'. A number of them I knew personally. The escape had been from one of the three large tunnels Tom, Dick and Harry dug from the North camp. The escape had taken place from Harry some days before and it had upset the Germans a great deal. In fact, as we learned later, it had caused great consternation throughout Germany. Even the Gestapo had been involved (Himmler had long since tried to get control of Allied P.o.W's but had so far been resisted by Goering) and it was they who had shot our colleagues 'whilst resisting arrest'. The Commandant himself was almost in tears: he knew as we did that it was a prisoner's duty to attempt to escape, that we were unarmed and should be treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention. The Commandant, although hard pressed at times by our antics, remained an officer and gentleman. It was his 'leniency' which caused him to be 'relieved' of his appointment. We never saw him again. We were then resolved to do our utmost to let the goons see and know how much we hated them.

In January 1945 it became clear that Russian troops would soon overrun the area, which was south-east of Berlin, and so plans were made to move the prisoners. The Americans in South and West camps were sent south, where they were eventually liberated by General Patton. The RAF from East, Center and North camps were sent west in several columns. This narrative describes that march.

What made the march difficult was the overall physical condition of the men. Food had been scarce, and suitable clothing even more so. When Jim Hunter was eventually returned to England he weighed 96 pounds, which is not much for a man of six foot one. And he was one of the fitter ones. A march in the cold and snow of January, which entailed carrying most of one's bedding and food, was not a slight task.

On the whole the guards were not in much better condition. They were those who were too infirm to go to the front lines. Jim's friend, Roger Simmons, reported carrying one guard's rifle for him, and even supporting him along the route with a man on each side. The rifle was returned, minus bullets and bolt. After the war was over Roger sent this guard food parcels for several years.

Food was short, there was considerable danger of frostbite and freezing to death at night. Some men contracted dysentery, some died from exhaustion. And there was the ever present threat from Allied fighters who might think they were German troops. A column of British other ranks actually was

attacked by rocket firing Typhoons. Sixty men died.

After a rest of several weeks at Marlag und Milag nord, Tarmstedt, a prison camp west of Hamburg, the march continued towards Lubeck, when the column was overtaken by General Montgomery's army. They then moved to Luneberg to be picked up by RAF Lancasters. Jim's illustrations include pictures of some of the stopping places on the march, such as 'the best barn in all Deutschland', as well as of the prison camp.

The excerpt begins as the first rumors of an upcoming move are heard in Stalag Luft III.



It was the winter of 1944/5 that rumours of yet another move were prevalent. A tame goon had whispered that something was about to take place although he couldn't say precisely when. This news confirmed our suspicion that because of the Russian advances we would most likely be moved on. After all, there were by this time some 10,000 air force prisoners of one kind and another in this huge complex of camps, most of whom no doubt, were Americans. It was unlikely the Germans would want them to fall into the hands of the Allies. There was another rumour, not quite so pleasing perhaps, that we were to be held hostage. Whenever and wherever made no difference; we began making prudent provision. Most had accumulated some small reserves against the possibility of harder times, including a few brickettes of coal. We had no intention of leaving behind anything which would be of use. First requirements, however, were the construction of means of carrying our gear. I still had my original battledress-trousers which when sewn and tied up made a presentable haversack. Roger Simmons, Ron Simmich (a New Zealander) and myself decided (it was not so much of a decision as a natural event) to travel together and although many others decided to construct sledges on which to haul their gear we reasoned that should a sledge break down en route it would be a problem to transfer what we had to an alternative means of transport. We decided, therefore, to carry all we could although we did succumb later on. One thing was certain. We would need to wear as much warm clothing as possible for it was mid winter and winters in Germany could be - and were - very cold. As a 'tin-basher' I immediately set to work to make water bottles and other accessories for the journey. Meanwhile, Jimmy [the illicit camp radio] kept us informed of events regarding the Allies' movements and the war's progress and our spirits were high.

Finally the suspense was over and we were told that we had to be ready to

move at 11.30 that night, the 27th January. I rolled all my drawings and tied them with string from my bed and placed them in my 'locker' with my remaining books with a label addressed to me in England! Who was going to find and forward them didn't concern me. It was just an idea. My notes, however, should not be left behind since I'd spent so much time writing them. My diary too; from quite early in the bag I'd managed to keep a diary of sorts on scraps of paper which I concealed in a hollow made in a bed post. There was nothing of any great merit noted in it, almost entirely personal jottings. I also had a small sketch book in which I'd made drawings of the rooms, some of the equipment we made. Roger wrote in his exceedingly neat hand, a verse of a poem: 'Not by Eastern windows only..' to celebrate my entering my fourth year as a kriegie. Such things I'd certainly not leave behind!

The S.B.O. [Senior British Officer] had ruled that no attempt at escape should be made during the march out of Sagan; for one thing the weather was definitely against us. Many of the guards escorting us appeared to have been imported specially for the occasion and were, by and large, older than we had seen around during life inside the wire. Presumably the younger, fitter types had been despatched to one of the fronts. Those marching alongside us were finding this no joke as they tried to keep us in some sort of column. Their rations were little better than ours and consisted of the oats-cum-sawdust-type bread and a can of meat paste. For them not only the present but also the future must have looked pretty grim.

The events of the next few days are recorded on odd scraps of paper which once, in part, constituted my diary. During the early part of the march, I decided there would be little future in carting, or dragging through the snow, any superfluous kit. I wouldn't be able to eat it! So I threw out some books and one or two pieces of 'junk' including the little roll of paper, my diary. It was one of my least rational moves. I must have been in a state of mental aberration. From the few remaining sheets, written subsequent to the march I can quote.

Saturday 27th January 1945 "Wrote the second part of the Engineering Drawing paper for Inter B.Sc. (Mech. Eng). Jerry Pitt and I were the only two stayers, the rest have thrown in on account of the news and rumours.

"This evening I got stuck into making water bottles for the chaps in the room - soldering lids and handles onto Klim and other tins. I'd made only four when the panic started. We were told to be ready to move off at 11.30 pm. I had my pack nearly ready and so spent time sewing and pinning things together. That which grieved me most was not the thought of a forced march to anywhere but the thought of leaving my sole worldly possessions of the last three and a half years; my mail, photos, books and all my drawings and reserve clothing - and the fact that I had only one more paper to write for my Inter exam. And I don't think I lie when I say I think I was doing pretty well.

“Sentiment apart, we have to move and that right soon. We put brickettes which we had been saving for a rainy day in the stove and got a really solid coffee brew going and had the odd quick bash (eating more than usual) through the ‘generosity’ of our room quartermaster, Frank Reade. My allocation was a tin of jam which enabled me to achieve one of my kriegie ambitions of bashing a tin of jam with a spoon! Time wore on. The move was postponed an hour at the time. We decided to employ the time by using some flour and make some shortbread. This was started by John Lloyd and continued by Bill Roe and Roger Simmons

“Sunday 28th. At about 0600 we prepared to move and finally moved as a body of about 1,000 from East Camp. We collected a Red Cross parcel apiece on our way out and finally left camp at 0800.

“The first town we passed was Helmsdorf and after 14 km we stopped in a most barren spot for ‘lunch’ for 30 minutes. There was no mean wind blowing and a fair amount of hard snow. Arrived Haldau about 1600 hours - 18 km - where we got some hot water, and some of us hot Reich coffee from civilians who, for the most part, seemed sympathetic.

“For about two hours we hung around the town square hoping to get some place to sleep. During this time we bought two very ropey sledges from the locals for forty cigarettes. Then our camp was split into two parties, one to be billeted in a church and the other in a school. Roger, Ron and I plumped for the lower ground floor of the school - concrete - and got a small space. The only way to keep warm was to sleep eight deep. In fact, that was all space would permit. No food or hot water were provided and the temperature in the night was down to minus 18 Centigrade; during the march minus 10 Centigrade. (If nothing else we always came across thermometers - perhaps to let us know just how miserable we should be!)

“Monday 29th. Spent the day at Haldau to let the Americans from Belaria and North Camp to get ahead again. Roger traded a tin of Bully for a loaf of bread - otherwise no rations. One *Appell* in half a blizzard and told tomorrow’s trek would be 25 km.

“Tuesday 30th. Left at 0100 hours dragging every thing we had on our sledges etc., destination Priebus. Evacuees on the road hindered our progress no end. Arrived Lieppa, distance 11 km at 1600 hours. Here we were billeted in a school. No lights and still no food. We lit a fire for hot water and afterwards retired to bed in the attic which was literally knee-deep in kriegies. Still damned cold but only minus 7 centigrade in the night.

“Wednesday 31st January. Set course Muskau at 16.10 hours. A very hard day - hardest yet. Lack of food quite noticeable - scarcely enough to keep us warm. Snow and wind were bad and the roads treacherous. The last five kilometers was very hard going as the thaw had set in and the sledges went deep into the snow. Upon our arrival at a glass factory in Muskau the French and other work-

ers were most helpful and generous with hot water and often coffee. They were also most amenable to bargaining for bread. Oberfeldwebel Stuhlmeyer (previously NCO i/c guards at Luft 3 and a man who did his awkward duty quite fairly by the kriegies) managed to get us billeted in this glass factory, the manager of which had been a P.o.W in America in the last war, and did everything he possibly could to help. SBO put us on parole as regards damage. The factory people gave us a free hand to the extent of providing coal for fires. We utilised the furnaces to the full extent for making hot water and drying clothes. I didn't sleep much at night for I was in an outhouse which filled with smoke which necessitated leaving the door open thereby making it pretty chilly.

"Thursday 1st February. Spent day at Muskau during which time we carried out an inspection on the sledge; didn't favour putting on such wheels as we could find or manufacture. Maggie Roth set the pace by standing at the factory gate with a tin of coffee and a D-bar shouting at the passing civilians '*Kaffee und Schokolade für alten Kinderwagen*' - and, what's more, he got one. Others turned out wooden wheels in the lathe shop. Although the thaw seems to have set-in we still intend to take our sledge, lightly laden, and our packs on our backs. Received half a loaf of bread per man and marching orders for 21.30 hours. This was later changed to 22.30 hours, at which time we left. The air raid which we hoped would prevent our move tonight, and the extreme darkness, seemed to have no bearing on the matter - we left. The East camp was split into blocks 62 (ours), 63, 64, 66 and 67 and the rest. They would leave tomorrow for Nurnberg - possibly.

"Friday 2nd. Marched through the night. We jettisoned our sledge after about seven km but carried all our gear. What a shambles. Bods lying in ditches, packs and belongings lying around them. We (Roger, Ron and I) kept going pretty well but were fairly teased out soon after dawn. Eventually arrived at a village, Graustein, near which we, and most everyone else, spied some milk in churns outside a farm and we wasted no time in transferring the contents to ourselves.

Just outside this village we were directed towards a large barn. This barn was the best thing yet, packs were hurled into the hay and we just dived in on top. We didn't stir till two hours later to continue our trek to Spremburg, a further eight km. Arrived at 15.15 hours. We were set down in some *panzerschule* and were issued with a fair amount of brattling soup - and were promised some water later. We left before we could avail ourselves of the water and marched to the goods yard where we hung around till after dark waiting to entrain in cattle wagons.

During our wait we noticed a scruffy looking individual coming along the track beside the wagons in a very nonchalant manner, sometimes whistling to himself, as he opened the axle box of each wheel in turn and from time to time would pour in oil from a can. He also added something from a bag hang-

ing inside his coat. He was quietly adding a little sand to the lubricant - for luck! Being escorted by a guard meant that conversation was limited. Nevertheless, he said 'When you get to Blighty tell 'em we're coming too'. And he went on his way rejoicing - a typical British Tommy. He did my heart a power of good, and probably others too.

We finally boarded, 43 in our wagon and they were only designed to take '40 *hommes ou 8 cheveau (en long)*.' Expecting to spend the night in this siding we got weaving making a fire to boil our brew can. We were doing very well until it was decided we should leave at 23, 30 hours. In the ensuing panic to collect our gear once more, John Lloyd knocked the hot water over. That was the nearest we've been to having a hot brew for sometime. The only thing left to do was to try to bed down somehow. I spent the night on top of some blokes. We were fortunate in being issued with a Red Cross parcel before we left the siding. Where those parcels came from I do not know but they could hardly have come at a more opportune moment.

"Saturday 3rd. Spent the day on the train - pretty chilly but derived a certain amount of rest although we all ached through being unable to move. Passed through Hannover.

"Sunday 4th. Arrived at Tarmstedt Ost at 16.30 and marched to a camp 4 km away. Now we come to the bitter bit; we waited outside those gates, wallowing around in mud and drizzling rain till 01.30 - the worst part of the whole journey. Damned cold and tired and no alternative but to walk around in very restricted circles endeavouring to keep warm. When we eventually got in we were given a cursory search and shown to some very derelict blocks where with the greatest of ease we just parked on the floor till about 10.30 next morning.

"Monday 5th. Moved to permanent quarters, Bk 22 Rm 3 which has a most teased-out stove, no lights, no beds, practically nothing. We stopped up holes in floor, dismantled the stove and tried to re-assemble."

This was Malag und Milag Nord, Tarmstedt.

Our days in camp were now numbered, certainly in smaller numbers than hitherto. Spring could not be far off and the end must be in sight. We spent our time making-do and mending; there was precious little to scrounge but we managed to find oddments around the place with which to furnish our abode - sparsely. The few remaining impressions of this desert of a place are the poor food and the lack of organisation. Our rations consisted of a black treacly type of bread which, surprisingly, we found to be quite nourishing, and a sausage paste. We got to like these as time went by even though this diet lacked variety: they were said to be submariners' rations. The disorganisation manifest itself in irregular *Appells* and a complete lack of information concerning our future for we were sure it could 'not be long now'.

THE LAST LAP

In due course we were on the road once more. Our destination was said to be Lübeck. It was now some three years since I'd been 'stationed' there and memories of it were far from favourable.

It was spring (when a young man's fancy is said to turn to thought of something or other - I'll try to remember!) and the outlook was decidedly brighter. At this time we hadn't much gear to transport, just the bare essentials. Accordingly we moved off into the countryside and were going one knew not where. The weather was warmer and the countryside did indeed look yes, inviting! Somewhere along the road we drew level with a field of rhubarb (not very ripe as I recall.) Now, an opportunity such as that was not to be ignored and the whole column simply diverted, guards or no guards, through this field and cut a very neat swathe through it. For some considerable distance along the road thereafter we left a fine trail of rhubarb leaves. The after effects of that foray were not quite so happy for some for, not to put too fine a point on it, it proved to be something of a laxative!

It was during this journey our syndicate acquired a pram. We came to a halt in the village square; the village name escapes me. The point was we needed transport and sure enough in this village there appeared before us several opportunities. There were women pushing prams. In our best kriegie German we started to ask first one then another whether they would be prepared to sell their pram for chocolate or coffee. And we bought our pram, not a large or ostentatious machine you understand. A simple green affair with four good wheels. The lady concerned was delighted as she lifted junior out and grabbed the flimsy blanket etc. And took our coffee and a 'D-Bar' of chocolate. We were happy too for we could simply put our packs into this and it virtually ran itself from there on.

Another opportunity to put our new transport to the test came very soon afterwards. Ron did a barter for some potatoes and later we got some onions for a few cigarettes. We could have a stew tonight! During the first part of our march we were delivered into a field where it soon became evident we would be staying a while, so without too much ado we began making preparations for a place to sleep. This was accomplished by digging an area and piling the turves so removed on what we estimated to be the windward side of the ditch, the idea being to sleep in the hole and to cover ourselves with the ubiquitous Polish greatcoat. Nearby we found a supply of straw in bales. This was indeed a boon and we set out to gather enough to sleep on. During my foray I almost came to grief at the hands of the Hitler *Jugend*, young boys and girls dressed in a kind of scout uniform. I was feeling very pleased with myself for having found a bale before they all disappeared and was making my way back when there was a boyish shout from behind me. I nonchalantly turned around only to find one of these

creatures shouting and pointing a rifle at me. A couple of prods from his rifle gave me the impression he didn't like what I was doing. He was ordering me to return the bale so I dumped it on the ground. Apparently that was not the idea at all for he waved his rifle in all directions and shouted some more before pointing to where I'd been. I had to admit defeat and picked up the bale and, under escort, took it back. Roger had more luck and brought back enough straw to line the pit we'd dug. Meanwhile Ron had got some water and was busy trying to get a small fire to burn in order to make a brew. Then followed the height of contentment, sitting in a field, beside a fire and a brew of coffee with my friends.

From there we set off next morning heading towards Lübeck which was still some way off. Somehow we got to hear that there was an outbreak of cholera. True or not, the SBO remonstrated with the Germans telling them that the war was nearly over and it would be in no one's interest to go much further. As a result we were directed towards a farm. The party was split; one going round a lake to some barns on the far side whereas we were herded into a large barn nearby. This was a monument of a barn which inside had a ladder leading into a hay loft. Again, tired and weary, we clambered up this ladder and threw ourselves into the hay and fell soundly asleep for some time. By now the guards were sadly depleted and those in evidence could not have cared less. They were far from home with little hope of improving their miserable lot. They'd lost - as we always told them they would. Now we roamed freely. Some enterprising types had made a sign which they pinned to a tree along the lane. The sign read 'Good pull-in for tanks' with an arrow pointing towards our 'estate'. At about 10.00 next morning, sure enough along came a couple of scout cars. In no time at all they were issuing copies of the *Daily Mirror* and white bread. This bread was like cake to us who'd eaten only the German bread for so long. But food was of secondary importance now for we were FREE.

Recollections of what followed although of no major significance otherwise were of pure unadulterated joy.

Roger, Ron and I decided it would be rather pleasant if we could find a car and drive home. In a little while we found a car, a staff car and a Mercedes to boot. Fuel there was by the hundreds of gallons in the centre of the autobahn so we borrowed a few cans, filled the car and loaded the seats with more and then parked it in a nearby wood. Next day would see us homeward bound. We would simply head westwards, hit the coast, drive to the nearest port and then scrounge a lift on one of the many ships that would certainly be there. From then on it would be merry England all the way. It was going to be the best outing one could ever plan. Next morning, however, there was little more than a track, from where our limousine had been parked, leading to the road. Hell's bells. Some miserable sod had pinched it.

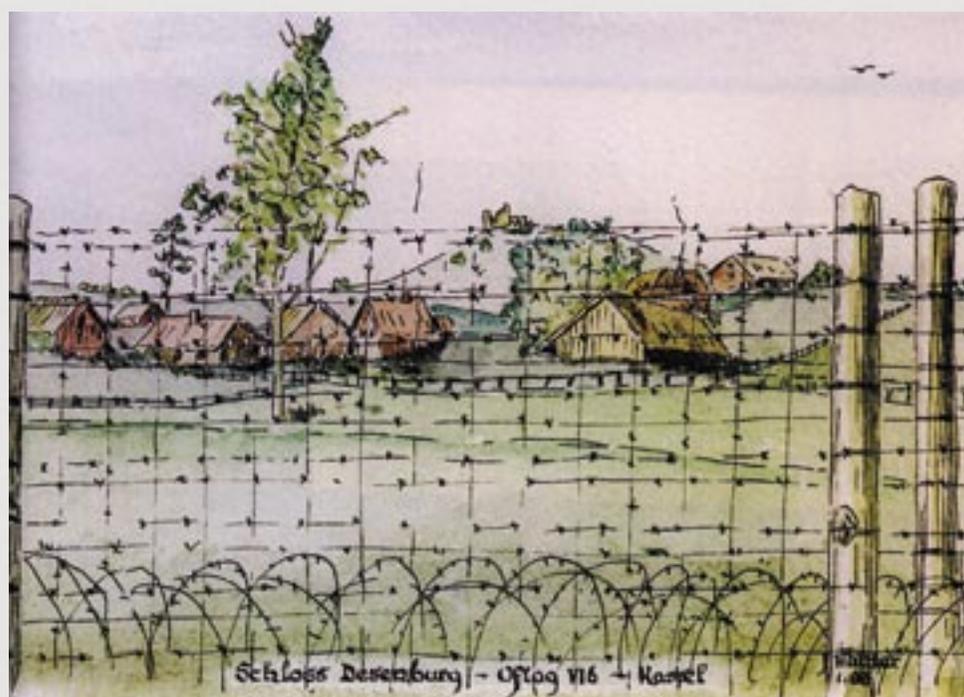
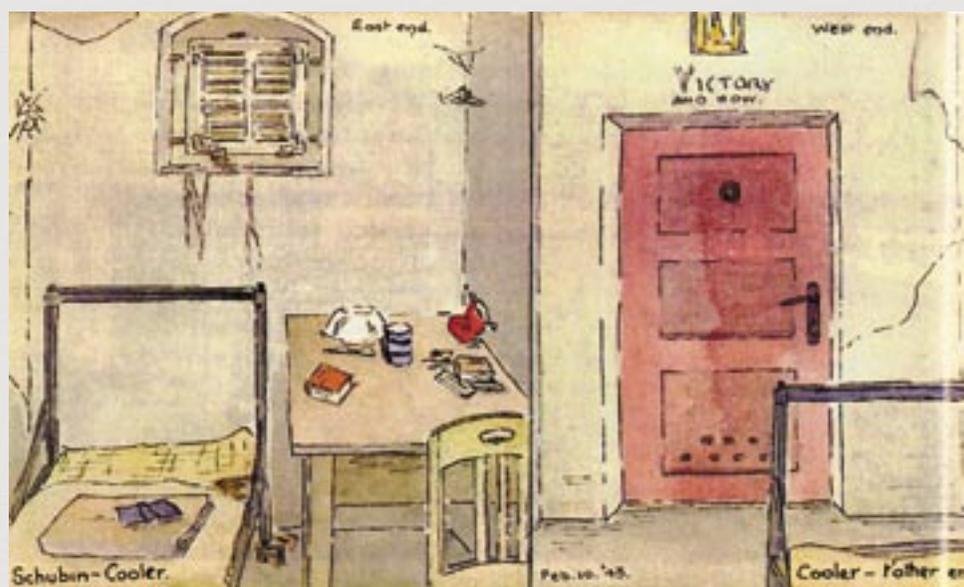
Jim Hunter arrived back in England to an emotional welcome from his family, all the more poignant because it was only then that he discovered that his younger brother, to whom he had always been close, had been killed the year before at Arnhem.

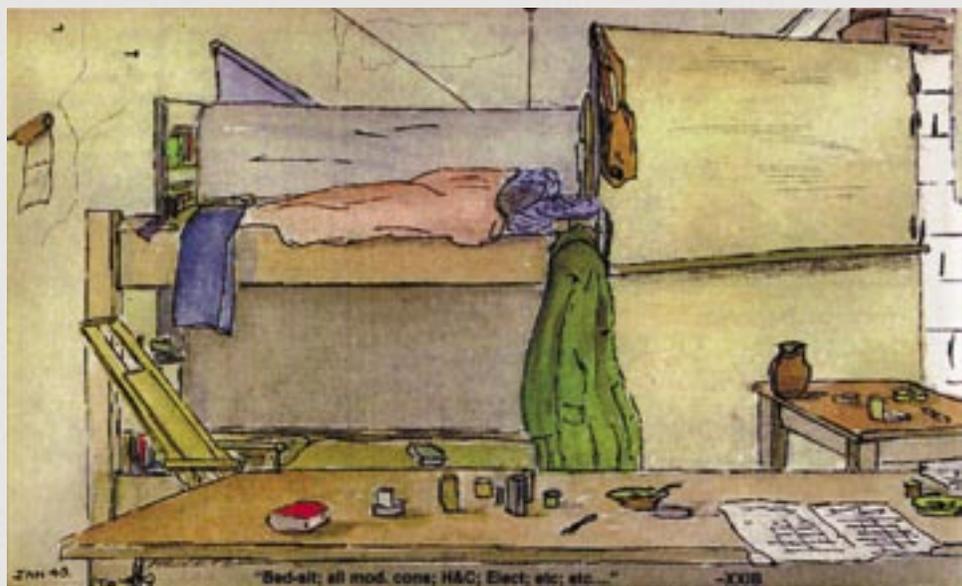
Despite his experiences Jim had no lasting animosity for the Germans. That Christmas he asked the family if they would agree to take in a German prisoner of war, from the local camp, for the festive season. The young German was somewhat nervous when Jim went to collect him wearing his RAF uniform, but the tension quickly eased, and the young man kept in touch with the family for some years afterwards, until he emigrated to Canada.

William James Hunter spent nearly four years in German prisoner of war camps. In 1945 he returned to the RAF, reaching the rank of Wing Commander before retiring in 1975. Jim Hunter died in February 2002, aged 82.

Allan Hunter is a professor of English at Curry College in Massachusetts.

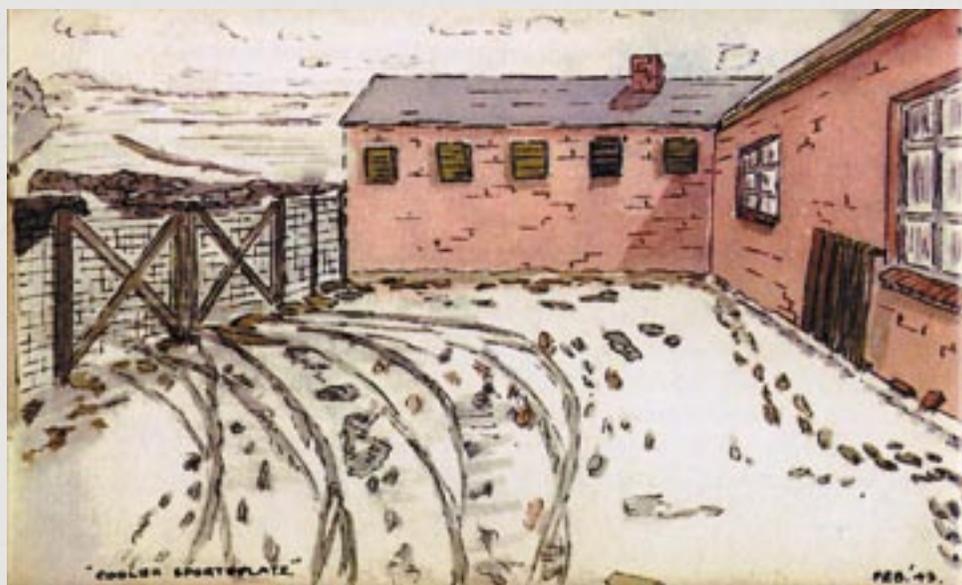
Note: The artwork which follows represents war camp paintings that Jim Hunter managed to create and preserve during his years of captivity. The full text of From Coastal Command to Captivity, including artwork and photographs, is available from Pen & Sword Books, Great Britain.





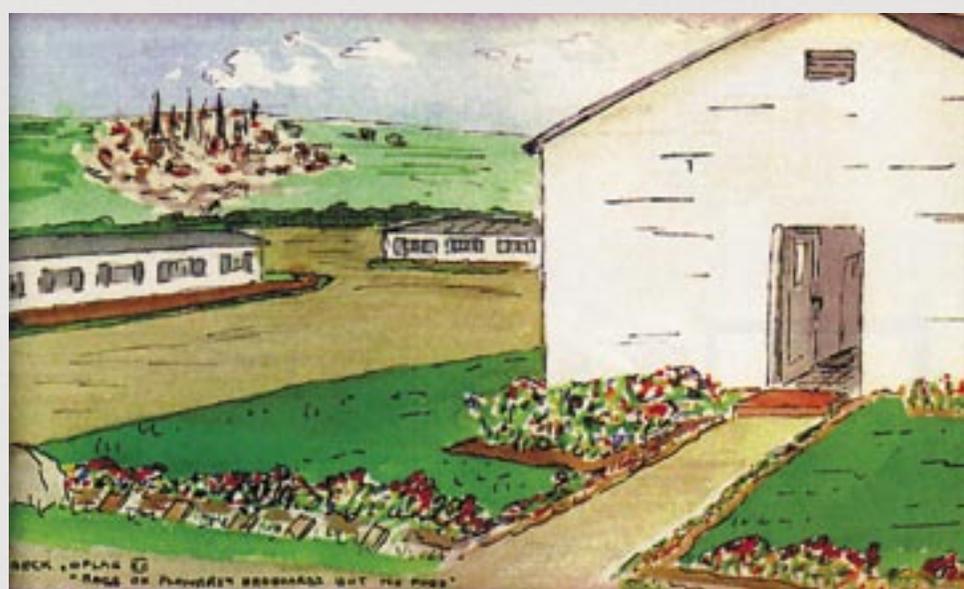
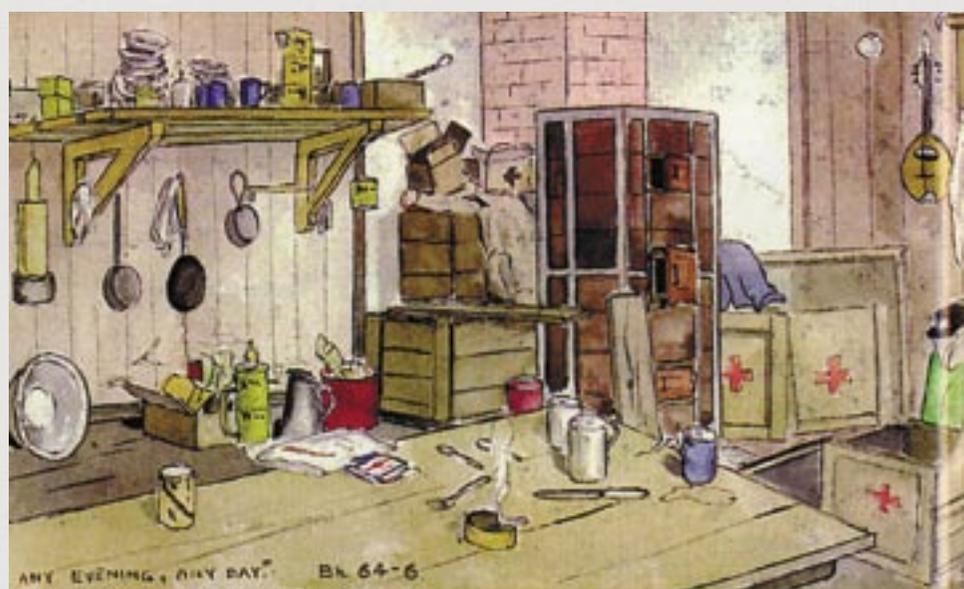
"Bed-sit; all mod. cons; H&C; Elect; etc; etc..."

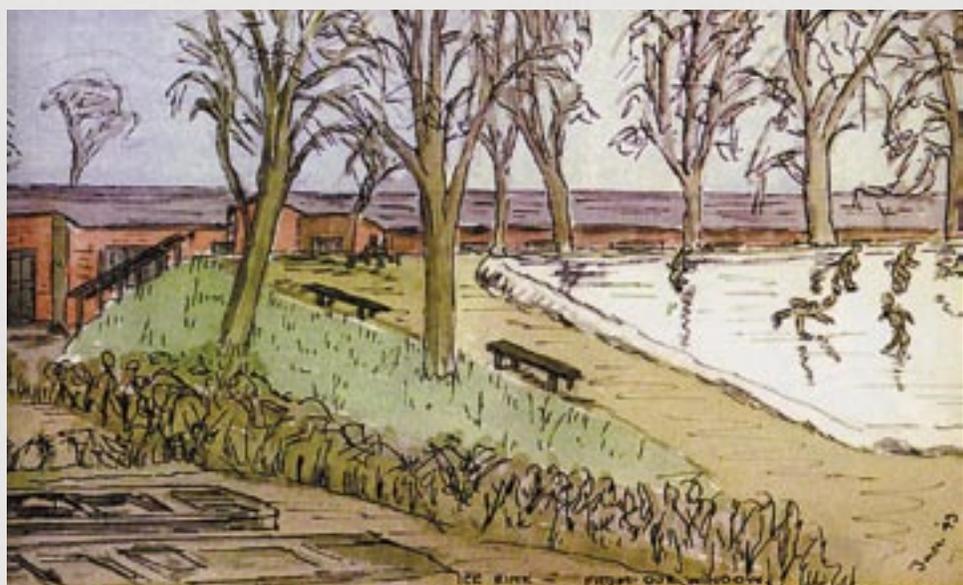
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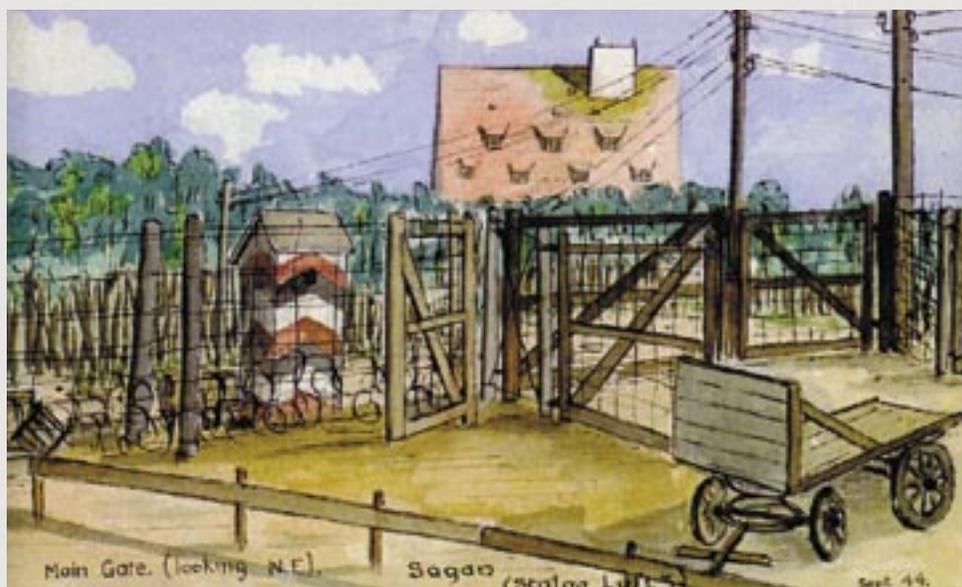


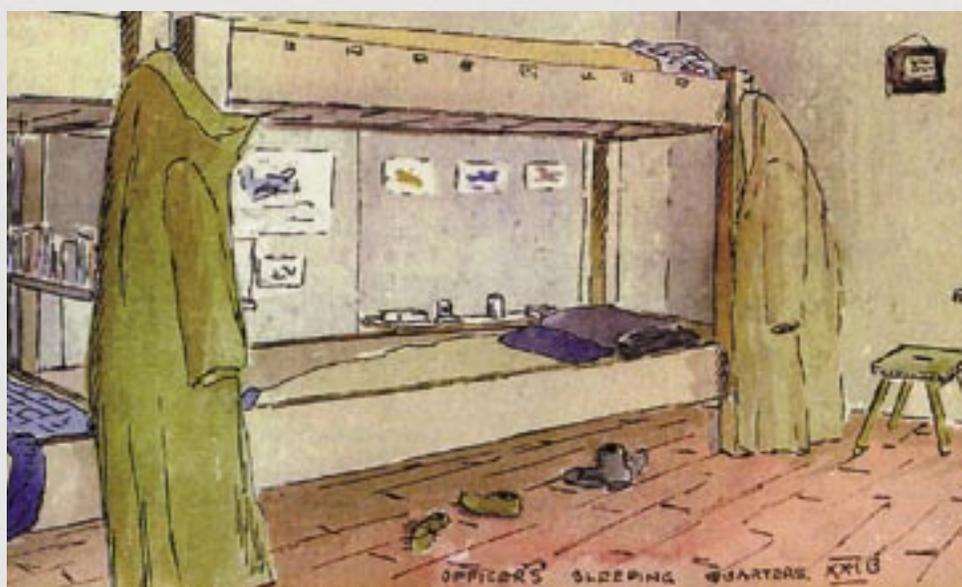
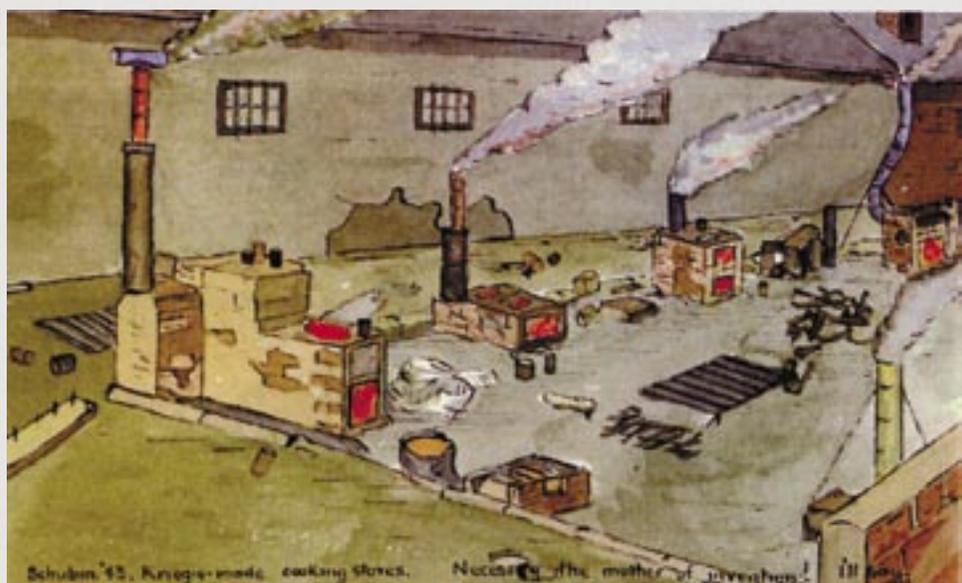
"COOLER SPORTSPLATE"

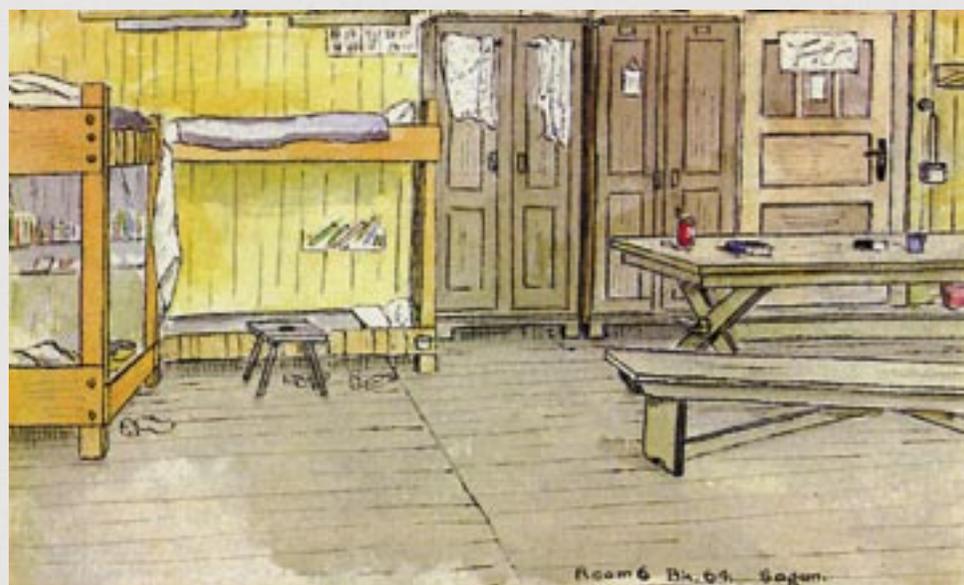
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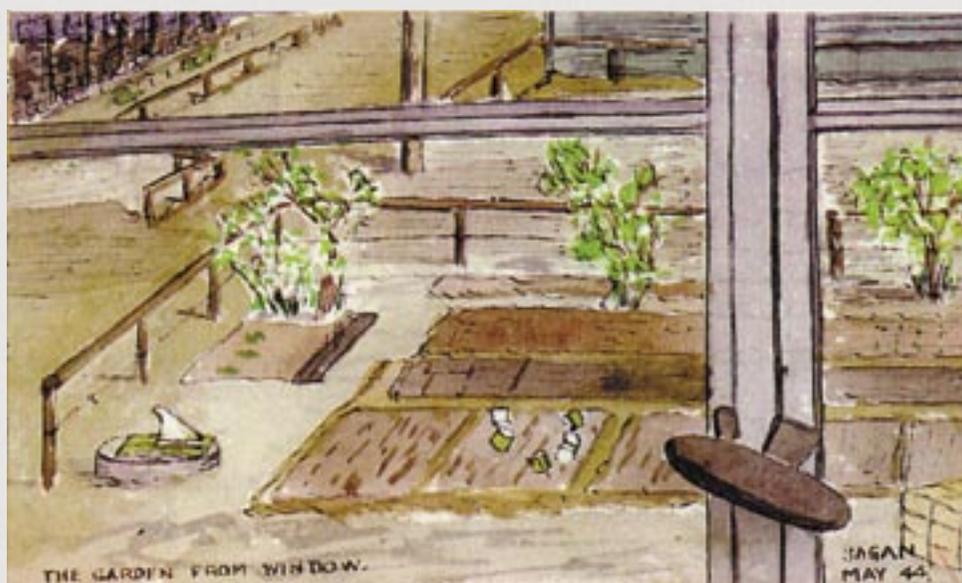




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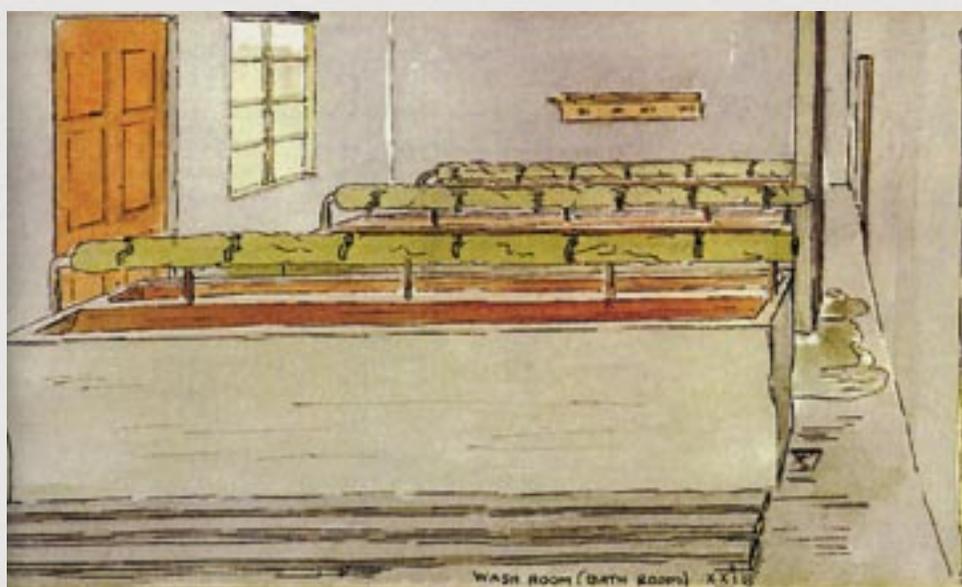


THE STADWICK HUNTER CORNER SAGAN.
Bk. 64 Rm. 6.



THE GARDEN FROM WINDOW.

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