

to Buchenwald concentration camp by mistake and were left there several days. The place was so crowded with Jews, that they just slept on the ground where ever they could. This was one of the largest and busiest extermination camps in Germany. Not only Jews were killed here, but any other undesirables in Europe also. Every morning all inmates must watch the hangings of those who were guilty of breaking one of the many camp rules the preceding day. This was used as a warning to abide by the regulations. One of this group was accused of breaking a rule so suffered the consequences. The real reason for his hanging was because of a picture he had painted on the back of his flight jacket. Each B-17 crew would have a name and usually a drawing on the nose of their airplane. Some would even have this painted on their jackets. The name of this flyer's plane was "Murder Incorporated" with the picture of the cross-bones and skull. The Germans made a big issue of this so the next day the hanging took place.

As a part of the German propaganda campaign was portraying all American flyers as gangsters released from prison, trained and sent to Germany as bomber crews. In the many cartoons we seen in the Nazi newspapers the Americans were always black or with long noses.

They reported that hundreds were processed through the gas chamber and oven daily. The furnace burned day and night, and the stench of death hung over the compound constantly. They told of piles of human gold teeth that were knocked out of the corpses before burning, piles of human hair and even human skin with tattoos stretched to dry. It was brought out in the Nurmberg trials that the wife of one Kommandant had light shades made of these skins. This story was so unique, that it was read to all of us under the same tight security that was used with our daily BBC news reports.

The Germans would very often try to plant one of theirs amongst us. When a new group of kriegies would arrive [purge], as we called it, they would send an English speaking German, usually one who had lived in the States, in with the other kriegies. As I mentioned before, we were all to check these purges and identify any people that we knew. This would clear him and he was forgotten. Those who were not cleared by this method were assigned special rooms where he would be under surveillance by experts until he was cleared or identified as a goon plant. One of these plants was exceptionally obnoxious, so after he was discovered to be a goon in kriegie clothing, he was placed in a room full of sadistic kriegies. Every day one of them would pick a fight with him and give him a good old fashioned beating. After about a week of this, he disappeared one night. A few days later he returned dressed as a ferret. He and his ex-roommates had a big laugh. He had lived in the states for many years and returned to Germany in 1937.

Nearly every Sunday the women mail censors would give us our weekly thrill. They would parade around the outside fence in groups, wriggling their assets, much to the delight of the kriegies. It was surprising how many bunk rats would decide to walk the perimeter for exercise that day. They would never say anything to us or even look in our direction, but it was a boost for our

morale. The goons probably considered it as torture for us, or they wouldn't have allowed it.

There is a rather amusing incident that comes to mind of when we were still with the British in the North compound. In one building there was a large hole in the sub-floor that prevented us from disposing sand here. A sadistic type Aussie drilled a small hole slightly off-set from the large hole. Whenever it was known that a ferret was under the building this kriegie would sit beside the hole with a large wooden mallet cocked and ready. After many tiring hours of this, his patience finally paid off. Suddenly up popped an inquisitive finger through the hole, Down came the mallet and a shriek was heard from under the floor. A ferret was seen running toward the gate, holding his hand shortly afterward. No reprisals were taken, but the occupants of that room received many killing looks from a ferret with a bandaged hand.

The assassination attempt on Hitler in the summer of 1944 always puzzled me. According to the Nazi newspapers, the bomb exploded right beside Hitler, injuring and killing all the officers in the room. In the same paper a day or two later were pictures of Hitler visiting the wounded in the hospital. They were wrapped in bandages till they resembled mummies, yet Hitler was not wearing as much as a bandaid. I always thought he was possibly killed and a double was used thereafter. Always before this incident, Hitler gave shrieking, insane speeches on a regular basis, afterward his speeches were delivered by Goebbels. Very coincidental.

CHAPTER V  
EVACUATION; THE BIG MARCH AND MOOSBURG  
[Jan. 29 1945 to April 26 1945]

At about 8:00 pm on January 29, 1945, I was seated in the inside latrine that was next to the front door of the block. A goon guard poked his head in the door and shouted to be ready to leave the camp in one hour. I took off down the hall like Paul Revere spreading the alarm. We were not taken completely by surprise, as we knew the Eastern Front was approaching. For about three days we had heard the artillery firing and steadily getting nearer. We knew that something would happen or the Russians would liberate us. The guns were so near that night, that it sounded as though they would be at the camp by morning. They probably would have overtaken us in the next day or two, but upon reaching a sizable river six miles east of the camp, they decided to stop and regroup.

The camp remained relatively calm as we prepared for departure. The weather was not at all accomodating, as there was about a foot of snow covering the ground, and starting to snow and blow some more. The temperature was well below freezing and approaching blizzard conditions. Most of us had made makeshift packs. I had cut up my sun-tan pants that I was shot down in to fashion a sort of pack. Some kriegies had made small sleds that did work out pretty good. We divided up our food, rolled up our blankets and were ready to go in the allotted hour. A few kriegies elected to hide out in the secret room beneath the theater. Whatever happened to them, I don't know. Hopefully they were set free by the advancing Russian Army.

After the war at the Nurmberg Trials of War Criminals, it was disclosed that Hitler had given the orders to execute all of the captured air crews. Goerring, so the story went, being the Luftwaffe Fuhrer, cancelled the order and issued the evacuation order.

As we left the camp each man was issued a Red Cross parcel and told it was to last until, who knows? About six teams of horses pulling wagons loaded with bread, led our column, and broke trail through the snow, as we embarked on what was to be a four day ordeal of misery and suffering.

The South Compound was the first out of the gate, then the West, followed by the British compounds. Walking four abreast, the column was strung out for nearly two miles. There was approximatly four thousand kriegies altogether. The guards were strung out at pretty long intervals and carrying very large packs. I noticed one in particular who was very small and old. He was having trouble keeping up when we first started.