

glad that no one was pointing the finger at me. Perhaps someone was shielding me? My foreman Bill seemed to like me very much and if he suspected anything he never said so. Also, there were more than 50% of the manholes still to be built.

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The following week or so I spent a lot of time studying English and writing it all down. I also helped with a project to beautify our camp. Each tent was involved in making the surrounding area looking neat. It was almost like a competition. There were two large piles of white and pink gravel stones in one corner of the camp. They came in very useful for creating all sorts of pretty shapes and fancy entryways. In fact, the whole camp looked much better than it had when we first occupied it. I think the camp commander liked the way we kept everything so clean.

I was still taking my early morning walk before breakfast and stopping to clean out the empty porridge containers. In the meantime I had managed to carve a wooden spoon to make it easier for me to scrape out the canisters. For a long time the porridge residue in those canisters was the biggest meal I had each day.

One day I realized that my mouth was infected. It was covered with a yellow film and I had difficulty eating. So one evening, after returning home from work, I reported sick. I was told to be at the main gate the next morning at 8:00 a.m. There were several of us who needed to see a doctor. A guard escorted us to the nearby hospital. This consisted of a small Nissen hut in which the consultations took

place, and two large tents, full of what looked like rollaway beds.

After the doctor had looked at my mouth he admitted me for treatment. So for the first time since I was captured I got to sleep in a bed. I was given some pills to take; I suppose they were antibiotics. What I liked best about being in hospital was that three times a day I got a hot drink. It tasted very good and I was told that it was similar to a spread called Bovril, which can also be used as a sandwich spread or to flavor soups. We also got more food than in the camp and every morning we got a good bowl of porridge for breakfast. I thought, it almost pays to be sick in a prison camp. But even so I would rather go back to my job as a timber-man and see my young lady occasionally.

On my first evening in hospital the other patients told me that an officer from the adjacent camp was going to come and read to us as a form of entertainment. They said he was quite interesting.

The next morning an officer walked in and greeted us with a cheery "Good morning." I had the biggest shock when I realized that he was none other than the lieutenant who had deserted our company. I wondered if he would recognize me. While he was entertaining us he kept looking in my direction.

When he was finished I stretched out my hand to shake his and said, "My name is Kern, Karl Kern." I felt like saying, "Remember, you sent me to the battalion headquarters when you deserted your company and left me to lead them out of the mess." But I knew it wouldn't make any sense to bring it up. He said he thought he had recognized me and we talked for a while, but he never mentioned anything about the past. After that he left and I never saw him again.

Three days later my mouth had cleared up and I was escorted back to the camp.

Back at the building site Bill wanted to know if I was OK. Walter had told him that I was in hospital. But he hadn't seen Sue at all.

The whistle blew to announce the lunch break. As I walked towards the old farmhouse I met Bill who said he was going home early and would I take care of things until he was back the next day? I assured him everything would be OK.

While I was having my cup of tea I suddenly thought of an answer to our correspondence problem. I was so excited about it that I didn't wait for the whistle. I murmured to the others that I had to catch up

on some work and left.

To make myself look busy, I headed towards the top of the building site with a hammer and a piece of wood. There, near an old empty pigsty and close to the walkway, was the only place where the landscape made a dip. Otherwise the building site was level.

I walked beside the dry stone wall, which ran about 90 degrees from the walkway, looking for a stone in the wall, about five inches high and ten inches wide, which could easily be removed. The idea was to pull out the stone, put a letter behind it, and put it back in place. No one would know any different and we would have a 'mail box' which was not visible to the rest of the world. It would be our own private 'post office.' We could arrange a certain day, say, twice a week, when we would put a letter inside.

After looking up and down the wall for a while I found just the stone that I needed. It was about half way up the five-foot wall and could be removed without any difficulty. All I had to do now was mark the stone on the surface, so that Sue could find it. I used my claw hammer to make some gauges which would be visible enough, but not too obvious.

Now I had to make a small, easy-to-understand sketch for Sue so that she could find the stone. I measured the distance from the stone to the walkway as ten paces. In my letter I would say twelve paces because she was smaller than I and had shorter legs.

For the rest of the day I was very excited about our new mailbox. This had to work out. It was our only chance.