

captain would make a decision the day I was interviewed because the new orderly had only three weeks to be trained.

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Three days after we had arrived at the camp, a man whom I didn't know came into our barracks asking for Karl Kern. I introduced myself and he handed me an envelope addressed to me. It was in Sue's handwriting and I could not figure out how a letter from her could end up here so soon after we had left Yorkshire.

I asked the man to sit down and tell me how it came about. He explained that when my group arrived at the camp, it was discovered that there were two men with the 'C' classification. They were sent back to Yorkshire and two others with a "B" classification were sent in their place. He was one of those two men and he had worked with Seppie for a time. When Seppie heard that the man was coming here he immediately thought of Sue. The same day he asked my former workmate, the timber-man, to tell Sue to write a letter to me by the next day, and he would have it delivered to me.

All the parties involved agreed to help out and the man carried the letter in his shoe all the way here. I was so grateful to him for what he did. I could only hope to be able to do something for him in return some day.

I couldn't wait to read my letter, so I just turned sideways in my bunk and started reading. There were quite a few pages. Sue told me about the timber-man approaching her and how she wasn't sure if he was

genuine. But he seemed serious, and he knew Seppie, so she had complied.

She also told me how heartbroken she was in the bus on her way home, after we had said our last good-byes. Her mother was very concerned about her, and had told her father about our relationship. He was somewhat taken aback, but remarked that if his daughter really loved me there was nothing he could do anyway, and she had his blessing.

Sue reassured me that she loved me with all her heart and no matter how long it took, she was willing to wait for me. Reading her letter made me feel very lovesick and I hoped that she would soon receive my letter.

The following morning I rose early. I felt that my continued relationship with Sue depended entirely on the outcome of my interview. There was nothing I could do to prepare myself, so I just hoped and prayed that my English would be good enough.

Promptly at 9 o'clock I knocked at Helmut's door. I learned that the interview with the other candidate did not go very well. His English was not as good as they expected.

When the captain arrived the result seemed to be a foregone conclusion. He wanted to know how Helmut and I knew each other. I explained the circumstances and he simply outlined some of the new duties which were expected of the mail orderly and then told me that I would be working with a lance corporal who would oversee my work and keep me informed of any new rules concerning mail. He would also be escorting me to the post office or anywhere else it was necessary for me to go outside the camp. With this the interview was over. The captain mentioned that Helmut would be repatriated soon and that he should start teaching me immediately. He also wished me well in my new assignment.

As soon as the door closed behind him Helmut said, "This calls for a celebration." We had a cup of coffee together, and a piece of raisin cake, which he had saved for the occasion.

For the next three weeks I spent every day with Helmut, accompanying him every morning to pick up the mail, and learning how to sort it and where to deliver the mail belonging to the British personnel.

One morning, about a week later, Helmut picked up a letter and said, "Do you recognize this handwriting?" Sure enough, it was from Sue. He said, "See how easy it is, just put it in your top pocket and everything is fine."

Sue mentioned in her letter that she had sent me a parcel. She finished with the initials BOLTOP and ITALY, which meant I truly always love you.

That same day I wrote another letter to Sue, I couldn't wait to tell her that I was going to be the camp mail orderly.

I met with Jack, the lance corporal who was assigned to work with me. He was very tall and very good-natured. As soon as he introduced himself to me, he offered me a cigarette. He said that any time I needed him I just had to look him up. The quarters of the British guards were located in a separate compound within the camp. He took me there so that he could show me where he lived.

Their barracks were similar to ours but a lot smaller. They had single wooden beds, instead of double bunks, and there were six beds in one barrack. He introduced me to two of his fellow guards who were there at the time. One of them was the sergeant in charge of the kitchen. The other was the driver to the captain and the camp commander. He also pointed out to me a small barrack, which was occupied by two of my fellow prisoners. They were the interpreters of the camp.

Eventually I got to know everything to do with the mail as well as how to record all the punishments which were given to offenders. They ranged from stealing firewood from the British personnel to being caught entering the camp with stolen goods from employers.

I learned that the camp commander, who had the rank of colonel, was very severe in his punishments for very minor offenses.

Besides being mail orderly, I was also assistant interpreter. That meant, whenever neither of the interpreters were available, I had to fill in for them. So one evening I was asked to accompany the colonel on a camp inspection.

I could hardly believe my eyes. He asked the sergeant, who also accompanied him, to slice open a tube of toothpaste with a knife, to see if there was anything hidden inside. On another occasion he asked one of our men to empty out his entire straw sack in the middle of the barracks in case he had something hidden there.

A friend of mine whose name was George was a sort of butler to one of the officers. One day the colonel walked into his room and caught George sweeping crumbs from the table with a brush, which was normally used to sweep the floor. George's punishment was to stay barefoot in a

tent for one week, without anything to lie on during the night. The bottom part of his tent was rolled up, so that his feet and legs could be seen at all times. He was also required to run continuously. For food he received only a little bread and water.

On another occasion a young man, whose turn it was to keep the fire going in the stove during the winter, was caught taking a piece of wood from the British compound. He received the same punishment.

I had to record these and many more punishments in a book that was kept in my office. Needless to say, the commander was not liked among the British staff because he treated them in a similar way. Among my fellow prisoners he was hated.

Helmut was with me when we picked up Sue's parcel. He put it in an empty mail delivery sack, which he carried to his place, while I delivered the rest of the mail to the British personnel. When I got back, he was as eager as me to see what Sue had sent. The first thing I saw was a Christmas card. We were reminded that Christmas was just around the corner. Then came some cigarettes, a bar of chocolate, and quite a few home-baked Christmas cookies. There were also postage stamps and writing paper. In a separate envelope was a photo of Sue, taken in their front garden with three tiny puppies in her arms.

I shared the chocolate and cigarettes with Helmut. He made a nice cup of coffee and we celebrated my new position as mail orderly, as well as his going home. We then hid the rest of the goodies behind a stack of papers in his office. You never knew, he said, when the commander would make an inspection.

The time came for Helmut to say goodbye. He was carrying a small sack with his very few belongings. I wished him all the best and told him that I would look him up as soon as I was repatriated. I thanked him again for helping me to get this position and he promised that he would pay my family a visit as soon as he got back home.

I went to my barracks to pick up the few items I called my own and moved into the post office, as it was called. The first night felt very strange sleeping in a place all by myself, but it didn't take long to get used to it.

I had one week to write a combined Christmas and birthday card for Sue. Her birthday was on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. Drawing had always been one of my favorite pastimes, so I drew my own birthday card and added Christmas greetings to Sue, her parents and to her sisters Pat and Daisy.

The winter turned out to be very cold. The biggest problem I had was keeping the fire going in the stove. In the large barracks the men took turns in keeping the stove burning, whereas I had to light it every day myself.

However, I was very fortunate, if I needed extra blankets to keep me warm, all I had to do was ask the lance corporal. He would get me almost anything I asked for. We had already become good friends. I also got to know the kitchen staff.

Once in a while, when I felt cold, I would walk into the kitchen and be given a hot cup of Bovril or coffee. More than once, they also offered me a fried egg and bread for breakfast. They took good care of me, and I never needed to feel hungry again. Considering that I was a prisoner of war, I had it very good. The only thing I missed was my darling Sue. During the nights, as well as in the day, I relived the moments when we were in each other's arms outside the camp.