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Christmas 1946 came and went without any celebrating. If it hadn't been for the fact that none of the commandos were picked up for work for two days, most of us wouldn't have known that it was the Christmas holidays.

In 1947 regulations began to be lifted. From March onward, all prisoners were allowed to send a letter every month. The camp was subdivided into four sections and each section had a certain time frame in which to write their letters. That way we didn't have to deal with nearly two thousand letters at one time. We were also allowed to send a parcel twice a year.

From the beginning of May, everyone except those who were under some kind of punishment could apply for a pass to go outside the camp within a radius of five miles. This was allowed one weekend a month. However, if anyone disobeyed the rules, he would be severely punished.

At the beginning of March I had to notify one person from each barrack to line up in front of the main gate with the open letters. The captain arrived with two interpreters, a sergeant, and the lance corporal, who was assigned to assist me. One by one the letters were examined. Out of about 500 letters, 15 of them had to be read and interpreted to the captain. I then took the letters to my office. In the presence of the lance corporal I had to seal and stamp them. It took all evening until we were finally finished.

The lance corporal told me that he would pick me up the next day to deliver the mail. The same procedure had to be repeated three times before the letters for the entire camp had been censored and mailed. It was easy for me to add my letter to those that had already been censored.

The next morning around 9:0 a.m., Jack pulled up outside my office in his Land Rover and greeted me with a cheery “Good morning”. I had the letters neatly packed in boxes. He helped me load them and we drove to the post office in Connington. We unloaded our boxes and waited in line. At the counter Jack introduced me as the new mail orderly.

The man behind the counter said, “I am Ken, pleased to meet you.” He took our mail into a back room and ten minutes later he returned with a slip, verifying that we had delivered 524 letters. The slip was stamped and signed by him.

We drove back to the camp a different way. On the outskirts of the village we stopped outside a house. Jack said, “My girlfriend’s house. Just wait, I won’t be long.” I watched him going up to the house and a young lady opening the door to him. He then glanced back at me and went inside.

While I was waiting, I enjoyed the beautiful countryside. Everything was lush and green. There were flowering hedges, daisies, and daffodils everywhere. Across the road, crocuses were growing all over a large field with cows grazing among them. Then I noticed a small stream running along the side of the road. I recognized watercress growing at the edge of the stream and I got out to gather a good bunch. That would be delicious in a sandwich. Then I noticed some horseradish, so I gathered a nice big bunch of that too.

I sat in the Land Rover, dreaming of the previous spring when I climbed down into the quarry to meet with Sue and hold her in my arms.

Half an hour later we were on our way back to the camp. Jack pulled up in front of the kitchen. As he got out he motioned me to follow him inside. It was close to noon and the cook made us both a sandwich – mine was corned beef with freshly picked watercress in it – and a nice cup of tea to wash it down. Delicious. It reminded me of my younger days when my brother and I used to pick watercress from the stream for my mother.

Next morning when I picked up the mail, I found two letters addressed to me, one from Sue, and the other one from my friend Helmut. I couldn’t deliver the mail fast enough to get back to my office and read Sue’s letter. She reassured me of her love for me and that she would give anything to be able to see me. She also admitted that on that afternoon, a year ago, she could feel we were meant for each other.

Helmut was very interested to know if Sue still wrote to me. He

mentioned that he had recently read an article in the German newspaper, which claimed that an English girl had married a German POW. They were married in a church. He even enclosed a picture of the happy couple, which he had cut out for me. He firmly believed that this would eventually be made legal in England. This was certainly an interesting development.

Helmut also told me about the situation in Germany. A lot of people were going hungry. Many a mother could be seen begging for food in the streets to feed her children. Helmut was still looking for work but his wife and his family were all right. Unfortunately he had not been able to visit my family as yet. He asked me, when we were allowed to send a parcel to Germany, to send flour, soap, and corned beef. These three items were in short supply. He also wanted me to send him flints for cigarette lighters.

Life was becoming better for us POWs. For example, if a farmer wanted to hire POWs to work for him, he could apply for permission for them to live with him. Whoever entered an agreement like that would have to stay with the farmer for a minimum of two years, regardless of when his repatriation came due. Quite a few of the men in our camp had signed up for that, especially those who had had no sign of life from their family at home.

A few days before my birthday I received a beautiful birthday card from Sue. The whole family had signed it. She also told me to look out for a parcel, which gave me something to look forward to.

In the meantime I had made a lot of friends among the British and also the German staff, including the camp doctor, a captain by rank, and the quartermaster, who was a staff sergeant. Among the German POWs there were the driver for the commander, two interpreters, a dentist, some tailors, and four medics who took care of general health complaints and of bandages needed for injuries etc. We had a fairly large staff of German kitchen personnel who cooked for close to 2000 men. I also became very friendly with the British kitchen staff. Because of my dark hair and complexion they called me the 'little Italian'.

I also made friends with some locals. The Pettifers lived about two houses down from the post office in Connington. I got to know them when I met their 17-year-old daughter in the post office. Later I got to know the whole family. They were wonderful people. Mr. Pettifer was one of England's well-known roof thatchers who put straw roofs on cottages, a highly specialized job.

In April I turned 23 and spent my third birthday in captivity. When I was first captured on the first of April 1945, I would never have dreamed that I would still be in England three years later.

Sue sent me a large parcel with all sorts of goodies, including cigarettes and the usual writing materials. She wanted to be sure I had enough writing paper and envelopes. I was beginning to miss her more than anything. Sue told me that some nights she cried herself to sleep because she missed me so much. She assured me that even though we were miles apart, she would somehow find a way to see me at the Peterborough camp. This time she ended her letter with 'HOLLAND', which stands for *hope our love lives and never dies*.

Around 2:00 a.m. someone knocked at the door of my hut. Sleepily, I got up and opened the door. A strange man was standing there, wearing a hat, a trench coat, and carrying a briefcase. He motioned me to be quiet and in a very quiet voice he asked if he could come in. He said one of the guards had told him to come and see me, so reluctantly I invited him inside.

He introduced himself as a member of a group, which looked into acts of cruelty against German prisoners of war. He had heard that our commander ordered cruel punishments for very minor offenses and he needed proof to be able to remove him from his post. He said that he realized this was an unusual request but without my cooperation they could do nothing. He needed to see the punishment register, which I kept. His group was in contact with the British military high command.

At first I hesitated, then I decided that I had to trust him, so I showed him the logbook in which I entered all the punishments. To my surprise he took a camera from his briefcase and proceeded to take pictures of all the pages going back about two years.

After he had finished, he thanked me for helping him and said that he hoped they would be able to relieve the colonel of his command very soon, he felt he had enough evidence.

I could not go back to sleep after he left, I was so worried about the whole incident, especially if he had been sent by the commander, to trap me.

When I delivered my mail to the guardhouse next morning, I spoke with the guard who the man claimed had sent him. He said that he would have come with him, but he dared not leave his post, as he had been all by

himself. I was relieved to know it was not a set-up.

May was a busy month for me. Most of us were allowed to apply for a pass to leave the camp and move freely within a radius of five miles at the weekend. We were also allowed to send one parcel to Germany. Each parcel had to be presented in open condition for inspection by an officer.

It was decided that about fifty parcels would be accepted at one time. This meant that it would take almost a month for all the parcels to be taken care of, one barrack at a time. However, there was no room in my tiny office to address, wrap and seal so many parcels.

At the next opportunity I told the lance corporal about my concerns, and he spoke to the captain. It was decided to move the post office and me into a Nissen hut. A few days later, Jack drove me there to have a look.

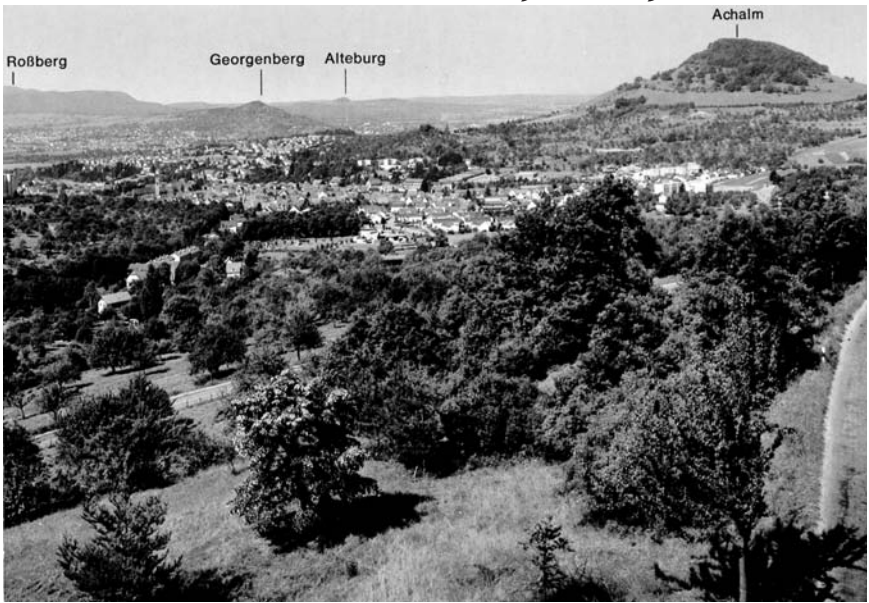
It was just outside the main gate and was divided into two rooms. One side of it served as the living quarters for me, and the post office was next door. Each half had its own entrance and a window facing the main gate. In the post office were four large tables and a smaller one in the corner, which was to be my desk. There was also a chair. I was very happy with this new arrangement. It was a lot better than I had ever imagined.

On our way back to the camp we again made a detour towards the house of Jack's lady friend. Before he went into the house he told me that he would probably be a little longer than usual. I assured him that I had plenty of time.

I sat alone in the Land Rover for an hour, enjoying the beautiful nature around me. Flowers bloomed in profusion. The whole air was filled with fragrance and I was reminded of my youth.

I used to love roaming the fields around our village. I spent a lot of time on my favorite mountain, Achalm with a shepherd who liked my company. He used to point out to me the plants, which were good to eat. One of them was sour clover that was very tasty and good for quenching one's thirst. Another one was silver thistle. He showed me how to cut away the flower to get to the juicy part underneath.

It was good to forget for a while that I was a prisoner of war. I wondered how much longer they were going to keep us in England. Personally I could not complain about the way I was treated. I enjoyed being mail orderly and I did not go hungry any more, but I didn't like



Eningen-unter-Achalm

being kept behind a wire fence, away from my family and friends.

However I was very thankful that I was well. Many of my fellow compatriots had lost legs and arms or were incapacitated for the rest of their lives. Some of the men in our camp did not know what they would find when they returned home. At least I knew that my family was all right and that I had a home to go to.

I liked listening to the meadowlarks, which nested in the fields around me. I dreamed of my sweetheart whispering, "I will wait for you my darling." The words that I wrote at the bottom of the picture which Sue gave me, echoed in my heart, *And like a miracle come true, I will find my lovely world, and you.*

My dreaming was suddenly interrupted when I heard the door of the house open. I would have enjoyed sitting in the Land Rover all afternoon. On our way back to the camp I asked Jack if he had a photo of his young lady. He stopped the vehicle and proudly showed me a picture of her. He said that they planned to become engaged in the coming fall, and asked me if I had a girlfriend in Germany. I answered that I had a girlfriend but

did not tell him where. I felt like telling him the whole story, but decided to put it off till a later date.

Back at the camp, we had an egg sandwich and coffee for lunch and then I made some notes on how I could best organize the inspecting of the parcels. I wanted it to go smoothly and with as little work as possible for me.

It took several trips in Jack's small Land Rover before we had finally moved everything into my own little quarters. The two interpreters and the camp commander's driver lived in the Nissen hut next door to me and I was glad that I was not the only one living in the British compound.

