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That evening I felt like the king of my own castle. Being able to live in the British compound made me feel more secure. The two interpreters from next door paid me a visit. Our conversation was very interesting and I learned a lot. They told me that the camp commander was being replaced during the coming week. I thought it best not to tell them about my encounter that night at 2:00 a.m. I also found out that the three of us would be allowed to use the same kitchen, which supplied the British personnel.

During the next few days I spent much of my time organizing the post office. I wanted to be ready for the big rush of parcels. One afternoon the German camp commander came to see me. With all the new rules and regulations we had to work together a lot and we became good friends.

The day came to collect the first lot of parcels. 50 of our men were lined up in front of my old quarters with their parcels laid open on the ground. Before the British personnel arrived, I made a rough check of the contents and that they all had string and wrapping paper which was properly addressed.

Then Jack, the captain, the sergeant, and two lance corporals arrived. The parcels consisted mainly of flour and sugar, which were very hard to come by in Germany. Those who worked in the mills could purchase the products from their employers. I was happy to have this job but was not looking forward to all the extra work.

Jack and I loaded the parcels into his jeep and took them to my post office. It was not until the early morning hours that I was finished repacking them. When I finally went to bed, I was hoping that Jack would not turn

up too early to go with me to the village post office.

The next morning I went into the post office to check up on the mail. To my dismay I found flour and sugar all over the floor. It looked like the work of an animal. Many of the parcels had a hole chewed right through the paper wrapping, exactly where the flour was. I remembered that I once saw a rat when I delivered mail at the Connington post office. It was by a very slow-running stream, which ran through the middle of the village.

When Jack arrived we both looked for an opening, where a rat could have come in, but we found nothing.

Jack suggested we try some rat poison, but I was not too keen on that, so I suggested putting the parcels on the tables. By now it was time for lunch. Jack suggested we go to the canteen, and then after lunch he would help me rewrap all the parcels, which had been eaten into.

It took the rest of the afternoon to rewrap the damaged parcels. We had to discard all the flour the rat had eaten into, which meant that some parcels had hardly anything left in them by the time we had finished. It was too late to go to the village post office before it closed, so we had no choice but to keep the mail for another night. We piled everything up on the tables in the hope that the rat couldn't get at them there.

The next morning I noticed that one of the parcels had a hole eaten into it again. The rat had managed to get onto the table. I rewrapped it, and Jack and I took the parcels to the post office.

Ken wondered why some of the parcels were so small and I explained what had happened. He mentioned that they had experienced problems with rats also. He thought it was because some people put rubbish and bits of food into the brook.

In May a lot of our men applied for passes to leave the camp at the weekend. So far, I had been so busy at the weekends that I hadn't had a chance to go out. In any case I lived in the British camp compound, so I did not need a pass. I was free to come and go whenever I had the time.

It was a cool but beautiful day in May 1947 when I made my first steps outside the gate one Sunday morning. I felt an awful sense of insecurity. Something inside me wanted to make sure I was not seen. For nearly an hour I had to keep telling myself that I was allowed to do this and no one was going to report me. But what if I met someone who didn't know we were allowed to go outside the camp? Then I remembered that about a month earlier it was written in all the newspapers that the

German prisoners of war had received permission to leave the camp unguarded.

When I came to a field full of flowers I sat down to soak in the scenery and enjoy the fragrance of spring to its fullest. I felt a little homesick and wished with all my heart that Sue could share this beautiful Sunday with me. It had been a long time since we had seen each other.

Judging by the sun, it must have been around noontime. I lay down amongst the flowers and fell asleep for an hour or so. When I opened my eyes I saw a farmer walking by with his dog. We greeted each other with, "Good afternoon," and he walked on. How different, I thought, from the time when the other farmer had chased me all over the field with a pitchfork.

As the afternoon progressed, I began to feel more at ease. I was no longer afraid of being seen. As so often when I had time for myself I thought of my homeland and my family and wondered how they were doing. I was concerned about my father, who had some health problems after my mother passed away.

I was feeling hungry. I decided to walk into the village of Connington, which was no more than a 20-minute walk from where I now lived.

On my stroll through the village I met some of my fellow prisoners who had a pass to go out. Walking by the Pettifer's house, I saw their daughter Marjory in the garden. I stopped to say hello. We talked for a while and then her mother came out of the house and invited me in to share a cup of tea with them. I told her I would love to.

I was a little nervous at first but enjoyed the luxury of being in an English home. The conversation was mainly about Germany and me. I told them a little of how I met Sue. Mrs. Pettifer then said without hesitation that Sue would be welcome to stay with them when she came to visit me. I thanked them very much and went on my way.

On my way back to the Nissen hut I noticed a small brook by the roadside with watercress growing there. I picked some and went straight to the canteen, where the cook had some bangers and mash [sausage and mashed potatoes] left over from lunchtime. It tasted good.

The next morning I had another letter from Sue. She mentioned that her father was planning a vacation to the northeast coast of Yorkshire, a place called Sands End. She was hoping to persuade him to go south first, to pay me a visit. It would mean a detour of nearly 300 miles. I was thrilled that there was a slim chance of seeing her and the rest of the

family.

Two days later we had the next batch of parcels checked out and Jack helped me take them to my office. I was busy wrapping them until well after midnight. Then I wrote a letter to Sue, to tell her all the news.

About half way through my letter, I heard noises above me in the roof. I could hear the rat make its way towards the front of the Nissen hut and slide down the wall. Then I saw a cloud of dust come out of a hole next to the front wall, followed by a huge rat. In the meantime I had armed myself with a piece of wood, which was left over from winter. I threw it at the rat, but missed, and the rat was gone. I put down some poison and stuffed some old rags into the opening in the wall.

The next day and the day after, the parcels had been eaten into again. It seemed like I had my work cut out for me.

One morning, after coming back from breakfast, I found a dog sitting in front of the door to my Nissen hut. He was a straggly gray mongrel. There was no collar round his neck to identify him. Several times I pushed him away saying, "Go home boy, go home." He just wagged his tail and came back. I decided that the dog must be hungry. Since I knew what it was like to be hungry, I went over to the kitchen to ask the cook for some leftovers for a dog which was sitting outside my door.

I went back to the dog with quite a lot of scraps. When he smelled the food, he jumped up at me with his tail wagging. Watching him eat reminded me of the time when the farmer brought us a plate full of sausages. The dog consumed the food as quickly as we consumed those sausages. I found an old dish and gave him some water to drink. Afterwards I told him to go home and he walked away. I assumed he belonged to one of the nearby farmers, and went about my business.

The next morning the dog was sitting outside my door again. I told him to go home. I went into the post office and tried to close the door behind me, but the dog followed me in. I thought it wouldn't hurt to let him stay; he would be company for me.

The dog went straight to the corner where the rat had landed two nights before. He seemed very excited and started sniffing around. It suddenly occurred to me that if the dog were kept in the post office while we had all those parcels, he would probably keep the rat away. It might be the answer to all our problems.

I told Jack about my idea and he said we could not keep a dog

without the commander's permission. He suggested we collect a few parcels and put them in the post office for the rat to have a go at them. Then we could let the commander see the evidence for himself. I thought that was an excellent plan, so I went to let our German commander know that he could schedule ten parcels to be sent the next day.

In the meantime, I had to keep the dog out of the way so I kept him at my place. He felt right at home there and settled down at the foot of my bed.

After one night there were holes in the parcels and flour strewn everywhere. Jack went to bring the commander to my office. When he saw the mess he admitted we had a problem and asked to see the dog. I went next door to fetch him. He took one look at him and said, "This is a wire-haired terrier and known to be a rat catcher, go ahead and keep him."

I was now a camp mail orderly and a dog owner. I had to give him a name. He was kind of straggly, so I thought the name Struppie would suit him. I found a thick piece of string, made a make-shift collar, tied the string to it and said, "Come on Struppie, you and I are going for a walk."

The weather was nice and warm. I decided to take a walk to Connington. As we approached the small brook that winds between the houses, Struppie started acting strange and tried to pull me along. At the end of the village, where everything turned into farmland, I untied him and let him go. I wanted to find out if he would walk with me. We were still following the brook. He ran ahead, but came back when I called him. It appeared that whoever owned him must have trained him.

After a while Struppie stopped and raised his front right leg and sort of bent it like a horse does. He stood there on three legs, sniffing the air. All of a sudden, he charged with tremendous speed down to the brook. I called him to stop but he kept on going. The next thing I knew, he had pulled a rat out of a hole in the embankment. There was a squeal and he bit the creature's neck. He left the rat and ran back to me, wagging his tail. I had to tell him he was a good boy and he went on walking by my side as if nothing had happened.

So I really had adopted a rat catcher, as the Commander said. I thought it best to put him on the rope, because I didn't want him to repeat the performance while we were in the village.

Word got around that I had a dog living with me. One of the cooks

had already saved some food for me to give him. Since I did not have any parcels in the post office for the moment, I kept Struppie in my room. It did not take long for him to get used to his new name and he was very good company for me.

The only problem was that he was dirty. I took him with me into the shower. He didn't like the water running over him and growled at me. However I made him stay underneath and gave him a good scrubbing with soap, which made him smell much better.

Two days later I had about 20 parcels ready to go to the post office. That night was going to be the real test for Struppie. When I left the office after work to go next door to my room, he wanted to come with me. However I told him to stay and watch for the rat.

I sat down to write a letter to Sue and everything was very quiet. Suddenly I heard a terrible scream coming from the post office. I ran to see what the commotion was all about and saw that Struppie had caught the rat, bitten its neck, and left it there on the floor. He was wagging his tail and waiting to be praised for it.

Since I didn't know if this was the only rat living in the roof of my Nissen hut, I left Struppie in the post office, much against his wishes. With 20 parcels sitting there, I didn't want to take any chances. However, there wasn't a sound to be heard all night, and when I came to check the next morning, everything was fine.

I had no more problems with rats from that day on.