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The next morning I rose early. While I was getting shaved and dressed I thought about the Ridgway family on their way to the seaside.

When I picked the mail up I found a letter from my family. They had received a lovely parcel from the Ridgways. They were thrilled about the sugar, the flour and also the chocolate, and asked me to write and thank them on their behalf.

They also mentioned that my brother Walter, who was a fighter pilot flying over Russia, was officially reported missing in action. In a letter from his commander they had been informed that although they searched the area where he was believed shot down, they had found no trace of the airplane. It happened about four weeks before the war ended.

I had always been very close to my brother. He was two years older than I and also taller and stronger. I had great respect for him. I felt very sad to think that I would probably never see him again.

During the afternoon the German camp commander paid me a visit. He told me that during the next two months about 80 men would be repatriated from our camp, but my name was not on the list.

For the next few days I was kept very busy with my postal duties. I received a letter and a postcard from Sue, mailed from Bridlington. Her parents, she said, seemed to like me very much. They admitted to her that they were very skeptical before they met me, especially her father, but felt much better about it, now that they had got to know me a little. Sue said that she missed me terribly and she would much rather be with me, no matter where it was, than on holiday. I missed them all too. I felt that I had found a new family.

In another letter Sue wrote me that she had met my dear friend Heinz and that he now had a girlfriend who lived close by. My other friend, Seppie, had been moved to another camp. She didn't know where. She also sent me cigarettes, chocolates, writing paper and a few pieces of clear plastic. I had started another bracelet for her but couldn't finish it because I didn't have enough material. Her father had asked if I could make him a cigarette holder like the one I had made for myself, out of toothbrush handles and in different colors.

My work at the post office had almost doubled. There were no restrictions on how many letters could be sent. One parcel per month was allowed. However, each parcel still had to be censored by the captain in charge. I had to be there as the interpreter and afterwards pack and wrap them all. Many a night I worked till early morning to get the mail to the village post office.

Sue and I wrote to each other at least twice a week and worried if we didn't hear anything within three days. She kept me well informed about the camp in Yorkshire. Heinz had been moved away to another camp and Seppie was getting ready to be repatriated back to Germany.

Communications with Germany were now open and we got to know what was happening at home. Unfortunately there was a lot of sad news. There was hardly enough food to go around. In many ways we were better off here in the prison camps. At least we didn't have to beg for food.

The summer was almost over and there was a whiff of fall in the air. One morning there was especially dense fog. Shortly after the trucks had left to take the men to work, we received word of an accident. One of the trucks carrying about 30 men had collided in dense fog with another vehicle at an intersection about 15 miles from the camp. Most of the men were injured, some severely and some had even been killed.

News reached us that the ambulance, on its way from the city, had collided with a bus. A doctor and an interpreter were badly needed to help with the injured and to translate for the medics. We were all frantically trying to find the doctor and the interpreter. After some time the doctor and his assistant were located, but no one knew where the interpreter was.

A Land Rover was ready to leave as soon as everyone was there. By

now the fog was so thick that one could hardly see the side of the road. The captain told me that he wanted me to go along to interpret for them, as he didn't want to delay leaving any longer. I joined the doctor and his assistant at the back of the open vehicle. The captain got in next to the driver and we headed towards the gate.

We were just turning the corner onto the road when the interpreter finally turned up and he quickly changed places with me. I watched the car disappear down the road.

About an hour after they left, a car driven by a civilian pulled up in front of my Nissen hut. He brought news that the Land Rover had had a head-on collision with another vehicle just before they got to the scene of the accident. Everyone in the Land Rover was badly injured except for the driver. The doctor and the interpreter were both in hospital with broken backs.

It made shivers go down my spine, to think I could have been one of those in hospital with a broken back. A few days later the commander took me with him to visit all the injured at the hospital. Their condition was very serious. Somehow the good Lord must have looked out for me.

When I was repatriated about eight months later, the interpreter was still in hospital and so was the doctor. Both were paralyzed from the neck down. I never found out what eventually happened to them.

October and November were very hectic. I was called upon several times to interpret in injury cases. Once, one of our men was stung on the tongue by a wasp. His tongue swelled up so much that he had to be rushed to hospital. He did not speak any English so I had to go along as interpreter. He was given some medication, which brought down the swelling, and he was released the next day.

Repatriations were going on every week. One morning I read an article in the newspaper, which said that any of us who received an invitation from a family could get permission to stay with that family over the Christmas holidays. The address had to be within a radius of 100 miles from the camp and the stay was limited to three days. I was excited at the possibility of being able to spend Christmas with Sue's family, even though I knew it was more than 100 miles away.

Jack came to tell me that he had become engaged over the weekend and that his fellow soldiers were giving him a party in the canteen. He invited me to join them. I told him I would look forward to it.

While I was eating supper in the kitchen, I asked the sergeant if he had a good map of England, so that I could find out the distance from Connington to Bradford. We worked out that it was approximately 150 miles. This made me feel rather disheartened, but I was determined to get around the distance problem, even if I had to see the camp commander personally.

A lot of our men were making toys and gifts for Christmas. I planned to make a doll's cradle for Daisy, a cigarette holder for Sue's father, a plastic heart for Pat, an inkstand for Sue, and a napkin holder for her mother. I planned to send them a parcel about two weeks before Christmas. However I still secretly hoped I could take it with me and give my presents to each one personally.

When Jack came in the morning he confirmed that what I had read in the paper was true, and that everyone who had an invitation was responsible for his own fare.

After we had finished our work at the post office, Jack took me to the train station to find out how much the fare was to Bradford. I was at least ten pounds short to pay for it. That didn't concern me too much because I could always ask Sue to lend me the money. But I was still 50 miles over the limit and that was more worrying.

Jack's engagement party went well. Apart from myself, our German camp leader and a driver were invited. The other driver and the interpreter were still seriously ill in hospital. The captain had a broken leg but was otherwise OK.

I asked Jack what he thought I should do to be able to visit Bradford at Christmas. He thought Sue's parents could send a letter to the camp commander, asking him to make an exception in my case. At the same time it would be a good idea for me to meet with him personally. I should tell him that I would work day and night, if need be, to make sure that the mail was taken care of right up to Christmas.

I wrote to Sue to let her know about the newspaper article. Maybe, if her parents wrote a convincing letter, the commander would soften and give me permission to go to Bradford.

I mailed the letter the next day. Two days later I received a letter from Sue, telling me about the newspaper article and full of hope that I could visit them.

Christmas was approaching fast. I had all my presents ready for the

Monday morning 1.12.47

My dearest Viki,

We have just got the order about spending Xmas with an Engl. Family. Now I should like to let you know it, because it is important. Tell my love the order says:

All P.O.W.'s are allowed to be absent on Xmas for Dec. 24th 2 p.m. to Dec. 26th 6 p.m. under following conditions:

- 1.) An invitation must be sent to the Commandant of the prisoner concerned, in which is explained, that the host will take the full responsibility for the P.O.W.
- 2.) If the Commandant gives approval.
- 3.) The distance must not be more than 100 miles.
- 4.) The costs of the fare must be guaranteed, either by the host, or by the P.O.W.

P.T.O.

Oh Viki dearst if your Father is writing, will you please ask him to consider "ME"!

The address he must write to is:

To the Commandant

59 P.O.W. Camp

Hood Hallon Lane,

Gate Yastro, Hunts

Well I will have to close now and remain once again
with lots of love

and thousands of kisses

your Sweetheart

Karl

Ridgway family and a lot of work keeping up with all the parcels going to Germany. All repatriations were stopped until after the holidays.

Sue sent me another letter and enclosed ten pounds towards my fare to Bradford. Everything was set for the trip, except that I had not heard anything from the commander yet.

Jack arrived to take me to the Connington post office. He told me that he was going to speak to the commander on my behalf and he would tell him that he was willing to fill in for me should the need arise. He was not getting any leave over the holidays and was going to spend Christmas day with his fiancée. What a generous and kind person he was. I thanked him with all my heart.

When we were through at the post office, Jack steered towards his fiancée's house. Since the weather was cold, he asked me to come into the house with him. His fiancée received me with a very warm welcome and served us a nice cup of tea with some scones. She insisted I look at the photographs of their engagement. When I asked about their plans for the future, she said they were going to live in her parents' house until after we were all repatriated.

After nearly two hours Jack thought we had better get back to the camp. I had not been in my post office long, when Jack came in, followed by the camp commander.

The commander said that Jack had spoken to him about my visit to Sue's family in Yorkshire and also he had received the invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Ridgway. According to the rules, he would normally have to turn down my request. However, because of the excellent report he had received from the lance corporal, he was making an exception in my case.

I had to promise not to broadcast this around and that I would do whatever it took to take care of the mail before I left. I promised that I would and thanked him for being so kind to me and said, "Sir, you can't imagine what this means to me."

"But I do," he said. He would write to the Ridgway family to let them know I had permission to visit and I should be receiving a piece of paper to confirm it. I wished him a wonderful holiday and he wished me the same.

I could have hugged Jack for what he did for me. Instead I thanked him several times.

Extracts from a letter to Sue:

10 Dec. 1947

My own dearest Sweetheart Ursula,

I am sitting in my office Darling writing this letter. This morning I mailed a letter to you, which I wrote in a hurry, late last night, to let you know our new camp number. Our new address is #59 POW Camp, Wood Walton Lane, Sawtry, Hunts. I hope you will have received that letter in the meantime. Well my love, at first I want to thank you so very much for the two letters which I received. Oh dearest I was so very pleased about them, Especially the one I received last night. Please forgive me for not being able to write sooner in answer to your previous letter. I have such a lot to do before the Christmas Holiday. On top of everything, they took away my helper. He was moved some where else. So all the work at the post office is left for me to do myself.

You may hardly believe this, but I couldn't find time to do anything for myself during the last three weeks. There is one consolation; it'll be much easier again after Christmas. However my Darling, I don't care how much work I have. Knowing, that we will be together in two weeks, makes me feel very happy, because it seems like eternity since we were in each other's arms.

Well dearest Sue, thank you so much making inquiries for me about trains leaving Peterborough on the 24th of Dec. I don't know yet, which one I will be able to take. Much depends on when I get through with all my mail. Hopefully, I will be able to leave early in the morning, since there is no mail delivery on Christmas Eve. I will let you know in good time, so that you can arrange to meet me in with your father. Please tell your father that I am very thankful for every thing he did for me, to make this visit possible.

I am very pleased to be able to tell you, that the swelling I had on my eye is much better. It is not completely healed yet, but I am sure, everything will be fine by the time I see you. Yes Darling I know that I should keep my eyes warm and also give them rest. Unfortunately, neither warmth nor rest is easy to come by at the moment. With the weather being so cold, I don't get enough coke, nor wood, to keep my living quarters warm enough, which does not help my sore eyes either. I am

much better off however, than most of my fellow prisoners. They don't get enough wood to keep those large barracks warm. To keep from getting too cold, most of them lay down under their blankets, after they get home from work with their clothes on.

Even though my eyes are not quite healed dearest, once I will be able to look into your beautiful tender eyes, will make all the difference. I simply can't wait to hold you close to me. My heart longs to be with you. So you will see, being with you will be the best medicine anyone could prescribe for me. I am already starting to count the days, the hours, and later the minutes until we are close to each other again. My greatest wish for a Christmas present is to be near you. So close, that I will be able to feel your heart beat against mine. To feel your tender lips touch mine, is all I long for.

Now I have a question that has been on my mind. I am wondering how many guests do you expect to be at your house for Christmas? How many aunts and uncles and other relatives will join us? I am hoping my love, that there won't be too many because I think that will make me feel very shy. Hopefully we will have some time by ourselves. Don't you Darling?

Well my dearest, I received a letter from home, in which my sisters tell me that they received the letter, which you wrote and I translated for them a little while ago. They want me to say thank you for them. The parcel you sent however has not arrived. For to day I will say good night to you and remain as always,

yours forever

Karl

PS: many greetings to your parents and sisters, also Lorna and Kathy. I shall be so happy to see you very soon.

I was indeed counting the days. My biggest concern was that my eyes would heal completely and that I would feel well. I had an appointment with the camp doctor twice a week. His treatment seemed to be working, and he thought that I should be all right.

Jack came to take me to the train station to purchase my ticket. He greeted me with his usual cheerful good morning, and invited me to the sergeant's mess for breakfast. He mentioned that the colonel had already

left for his Christmas vacation and the captain was standing in for him. He himself was taking his leave over the New Year holidays.

Both the colonel and the captain were very fair men, which made camp life much more bearable. I heard that quite a number of our men got permission to visit with various English families.

I wondered if my family would have a real Christmas tree, like we used to when we were children. When Christmas approached, we used to watch our mother baking all sorts of goodies. She had to hide them from us otherwise there wouldn't have been many left by the time Christmas Eve came around.

I can remember my brother and I going with our father into the woods, to a designated area, to pick out a tree, cut it, and then carry it home. That was quite a treat for us. I doubted if they would be able to do that. From what I had heard, they wouldn't be able to have much of anything. Sue's mother had sent them a parcel of food and I was able to send some flour and sugar. So hopefully they would be able to bake a few cookies.

Sue wrote me that with all the excitement and anticipation of my visit, she didn't sleep any more at night. She couldn't wait until she was in my arms. She mentioned that there would be a lot of her relatives at their house on Christmas Eve. She did not say that they were anxious to meet me, which left me somewhat apprehensive. Being behind barbed wire for three years, isolated from the general public, didn't exactly boost my confidence. I hoped that I wouldn't have to socialize too much.

Before going to bed that night I paid a visit next door where the two drivers lived, and told them that I needed to be taken to Peterborough early morning on Christmas Eve. They assured me that one of them would be able to take me there. (I had done them favors in the past too). Kurt came with me to the canteen for breakfast, a nice hot cup of tea with bacon and scrambled egg.

After our short trip to the Connington post office, I asked Jack to come into my hut with me if he had a few minutes to spare. I had a little present for him as a thank you for all he had done for me. It was a pen holder, similar to the one I made for Sue. In the front I had engraved his name, and at the bottom I wrote *Christmas 1947 from your friend Karl*. He was very pleased and said that he would treasure it and always remember me as his German friend.

Sue had once told me that one of her uncles was very much against her being friendly with a German prisoner of war. I started to worry if he was going to be there on Christmas Eve. If he were, I would just have to show him that I was a normal human being like everyone else.

The last day before my trip to Bradford was finally here. All my parcels were wrapped with the names on. Apart from that, all I had were the clothes I stood up in, so I was going to travel light.

Before the day was out, Jack came to look in on me to let me know that I needn't worry about the mail. For one thing, he didn't think there would be much, and whatever there was, he would take care of it.

My friend the tailor had made a good size bag for me to carry all my gifts in. It was made from a piece of canvas, lined with silk. It even had leather straps and a pocket on one side. I was very proud of it. To be sure that I didn't forget, I put my train tickets into the pocket of the bag before I went to bed.

I also took Struppie for a walk. He must have sensed that I was going somewhere without him because he never left my side the whole evening. Since we had no parcels in the post office, I let him sleep at the foot of my bed.