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Two days later we were all asked to line up for roll call. We were informed that the complete repatriation of the camp would take place in three stages. All the names were read out and my name came up in the last stage, which was to be on April 30th, just six days away. The last mailing was to be in two days time. I was glad that finally we knew where we stood and could prepare ourselves to go home.

The next morning Jack came to see me at the office. He had been assigned to stay until all of us were gone. Most of his comrades would be going to different assignments around the country and some would be discharged.

After I had delivered the last of the mail, my duty as mail orderly was completed and I met Jack at the sergeants' mess for lunch. The boys in the kitchen told me that they hoped I would come and eat there every day until my repatriation.

When I got back to my hut I put Struppie's lead on him and we walked to the farm, which would be his new home. As we passed our favorite pond, I had to stop and sit down and remember the last time I sat there with Sue, the day I asked for her hand in marriage. I thought how strange life was. Here I was in an enemy country, not wanting to leave it, and realizing that there were so many good people everywhere.

I had plenty of time, so I decided to play with Struppie one last time and give him some affection. I knew I was going to miss him very much and I felt I needed some affection too. I took another good look at our favorite dragonfly pond, wishing that I had a camera to capture these wonderful memories. Then we strolled through the fields to Struppie's

new home.

The farmer's wife was busy in the garden. She saw us coming and waved. As we got closer I took Struppie off the lead. The lady called him by his name and he ran towards her as if he had always known her. She invited me in but I declined as I had plenty to do to get everything ready. I asked her to put Struppie on the leash until I was out of sight. I didn't want him to run after me. Then I told him that I was going to leave him and that he had to be a good boy for the lady. I hugged him once more and turned for home. When I looked back I saw him going into the house.

The next three days were occupied with packing and getting ready for the first leg of our repatriation. We were told that we would be traveling by train to London and then to a transit camp somewhere in the south of England. I had quite a few clothes, which my tailor friend had made me, and also a couple of plants that were my prize possession.

On our last day we visited with old friends and exchanged addresses. I received a parcel from Sue, containing a few packets of cigarettes, some candies, and other goodies, which would come in handy while traveling.

Best of all, the boys in the orderly room put me through to Sue's neighbors on the phone, and Sue and I talked together for a few minutes.

On the morning of April 30th the final 400 men were all lined up, with two officers and two corporals to accompany us. Some of us had to open our kit bags for inspection before we were put on large military trucks to be taken to the railway station.

A special train was waiting to take us to London. The ride was very unpleasant. We were cramped together like flies, many had to stand all the way, and on top of that it was an unusually hot day. We were issued one sandwich and nothing to drink. The ride took all day and I was very glad when we arrived in London.

At around 5:30 p.m. we were unloaded and taken to a large hall. It reminded me so much of the day we arrived in London three years ago. This time, however, we were not stripped naked. Instead, we were physically examined by a doctor, then fingerprinted and handed our release document. We were told to keep this paper with us at all times.

The same evening we were all transported via underground to Bury St. Edmunds. We had to walk to the transit camp and the weight of our kit bags (about 50 pounds) made us all tired and weary. The conditions in

the camp were similar to three years ago. Over 100 of us were packed into one hut. We had to sleep on the floor, or wherever there was room to lie down. I thought longingly of my Nissen hut at Connington, a palace compared to this.

But it was only to be for fourteen days. The food was awful and not enough and I longed for Sue. I found out the exact address of the camp so that she could write to me.

The address was: # 186 POW Base Camp, Farnham Park, Nr. Bury St. Edmunds, Serial. # 342 / No. of hut # 134, Suffolk.

My first letter to Sue was full of complaints. I just wasn't used to living like a POW any more. Most of the men sat around all day doing nothing but playing cards. I kept to myself. My only thought all day was of the sweetheart I had left behind.

After about a week I received a letter from Sue. She told me how much she missed me and she hoped and prayed that I was all right. On her trip back to Bradford she couldn't stop crying. Her world felt like it had come to an end.

Camp life was very boring. The nights were the worst because the weather had turned unseasonably hot. Being cooped up in those wooden barracks was a nightmare for us all. We had worked on English farms, building sites, coalmines and brickyards for three years, and now we were being shoved off. Maybe they wanted us to feel that we had lost the war.

Finally the day came to leave. On May 16th, about 1000 men were taken by train to Harwich, to be loaded onto a troop transport ship. The weather was beautiful, which indicated a good crossing.

At noon we set out across the Channel, away from beautiful England. I had grown to love its people and the further we sailed away the heavier my heart became. I said a silent good-bye to the disappearing coastline.

After an hour at sea the weather suddenly changed. Huge waves lapped the boat and almost everyone became seasick. The ship had three decks. I happened to be on the second one. The men on the third deck were hanging over the railing vomiting. The green juice from their stomachs came raining down on us, standing at the railings below, hoping the air would make us feel better. Instead it made us feel worse.

We were on the water for eight hours. When we finally arrived at the Hoek of Holland at 8:00 p.m. that evening, we were worn out.

Four hours later we were on a train taking us through Holland into Germany. That night I was so tired that I just slid down where I was standing in the crowded train and tried to get some rest.

When we finally arrived, we found ourselves near Hanover, in the transit camp of Munster-Lager. Some of us slept in tents, while others, including myself, found shelter in wooden barracks. I was so tired and weary that I slept for a whole day without any food. When I woke up, I found out that the food was even worse than in England. Things were getting worse rather than better. The camp was packed with about 1000 men.

We were told that it would take six to eight days until we would continue our trip to our respective areas, either American, British, French or Russian occupied zones. The next six days were hell. We were hardly given anything to eat or drink. No one was allowed to leave the camp.

On May 24th I was on a train going south towards the French zone. By now I didn't much care what happened. I was glad that Sue didn't know where I was. She would probably think that I was at home with my family. I had asked her to write to my home address so that I would have a letter by the time I got there.

After about five hours we finally reached Bad Kreuznach, not far from the city I had to report to when I joined the German air force as an 18-year-old. I had made a six-year circle around different parts of the world and ended up at the same place where I had started out. I was about two hours from home.

As the train slowly rolled into the station I could hardly believe my eyes. There were about 50 French soldiers lining the platform with bayonets on their rifles. I thought we were supposed to be released and now we were being taken prisoner all over again. There were only a handful of British soldiers accompanying thousands of us, and now half the French army seemed to be taking over.

After getting off the train we were lined up and marched to our new camp, flanked by the French soldiers. We were treated like a new lot of prisoners.

The next day we were physically examined. They were mainly looking for a stamp under our arms. During the war, all the men belonging to an SS unit had their blood group permanently branded into their skin. It could not be erased except by surgery. This was done in case they received

any injuries in battle which required blood, to find out what type of blood the injured man needed. It was not practiced in any other unit except the SS. All those who were found with such a mark were sent to France to work in their coalmines, three years after the war had ended. Again I was glad of the decision I had made to join the paratroopers instead of the SS.

Four more days in the POW camp, which seemed more like four years, and I was released. There were about 30 of us lined up in front of the camp gate. We were each given a voucher for sandwiches, which constituted our food ration until we got home. In my pocket I carried my certificate of discharge, which entitled me to ride the train to the city of Reutlingen, which was about four miles from my village.

III
PARTICULARS OF DISCHARGE
Entlassungsvermerk

FRANZ-Z.


THE PERSON TO WHOM THE ABOVE PARTICULARS REFER
Die Person auf die sich obige Angaben beziehen

WAS DISCHARGED ON (Date) FROM THE
wurde am (Datum der Entlassung) von/von der entlassen



LY. F. W. A. F. F. E.
2/6/48

RIGHT THUMBPRINT
Abdruck des rechten Daumens



CERTIFIED BY
Beglaubigt durch
OFFICIAL EMBOSSED SEAL

NAME, RANK AND APPOINTMENT OF
Land OFFICER IN Amtlicher
BLOCK CAPITALS
Reutlingen, den 26. Mai 1948

Dieser Heimkehrer unterliegt gemäß Rundschreiben 4427 des Staatskommissars vom 13. 1. 47 Abs. II, Ziffer 3 nicht der Zwangsprüfung.

Die polizeiliche Anmeldung kann erfolgen. Lebensmittelkarten können ausgeben werden.

Im Auftrag: *Christoffel*

ORGANIZATION, e.g. "R.A.D.", "N.S.F.K." ETC., OR PARA MILITARY
Wehrmachtteil oder Gliederung der die Einheit angehört, z.B. "Hitlerjugend", "Kriegsmarine", "Luftwaffe", "Volkssturm", "Waffen SS", oder "R.A.D.", "N.S.F.K." u.s.w.



Reutlingen-Enninger
St. 5. 48



Einwohnermeldeamt
H. B. ...

Entlassungsbüro
gez. *[Signature]*

BR ...
Ces ...

Depot de Transit No 1
26. MAI. 1948

Autorisé à rentrer dans ses foyers
Le Chef de Bataillon SALAC
Commandant le Depot de Transit No 1



18 MAI 1948



