

FEBRUARY 8TH, 1945 - MAY 7TH, 1945.....88DAYS

THESE DATES WILL REMAIN UPPER MOST IN MOST OF THE 2500 to 3000 OR SO POW'S MINDS AS ONE OF THE WARS HARROWING EXPERIENCES OF THEIR LIFE TIME. IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE "INFAMOUS DEATH MARCH". FOR 88 DAYS WE MARCHED CLEAR ACROSS NORTHERN GERMANY (WESTWARD) FROM THE CAMP (STALAG LUFT IV GROSS TYCHOW) TO HAMBURG, THEN BACK EASTWARD TOWARD BERLIN, THENCE SOUTHERLY TOWARD LIEPZIG WHERE WE WERE FINALLY LIBERATED BY THE RUSSIANS ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE ELBE RIVER AT HALLE, GERMANY. THE REASONS FOR THE BACK-FORTH MARCHING VARIED. 1.) FROM THE DEEP HATRED AND FEAR OF BEING TAKEN BY THE RUSSIANS (WHOSE POLICIES OF TAKING NO PRISONERS, ESPECIALLY GERMANS, BUT JUST SHOOTING THEM AND LEAVING THEM FOR DEAD). 2.) TO THE BRITISH, WHERE THEY FELT THAT THEY SOMEHOW, SOMEWAY COULD SURVIVE AND WIN THE WAR. 3.) TO THE AMERICANS, THEY FELT SOMEWHAT SURPRISED AS TO THEIR STRENGTH, NOT THEIR SUPERIORITY ON THE GROUND FORCES, BUT THE STRENGTH IN THE AIR WITH THEIR HEAVY BOMBER PLANES. BUT THEY FELT IF THEY HAD TO SURRENDER TO THE AMERICANS, THEY WOULD DO SO BECAUSE THEY FELT THEY WOULD BE TREATED FAIRLY AS PRISONERS OF WAR.

THE MARCH WAS ONE OF THE CRUELEST OF TREATMENTS TO ANY PRISONERS OF WAR. THE TREATMENT CONSISTED OF FORCED MARCHES, STARVATION DIETS, MARCHING THROUGH HOSTILE CROWDS WITH LITTLE OR NO PROTECTION AND THE SHOOTING OF THOSE PRISONERS WHO THOUGHT IT WOULD BE SAFER BY ESCAPING FROM THE RANKS TO THE SAFER HAVENS OF FRIENDLY GERMAN PEOPLE TO TRY AND REACH THE AMERICAN OR BRITISH LINES OR TO TRY AND REACH BY THE UNDERGROUND PEOPLE TO THE NEUTRALITY COUNTRIES OF SWITZERLAND OR SWEDEN.

THE FORCED MARCHING CONSISTED OF QUICK MARCHING, THEY WOULD BAYONET THOSE WHO COULD NOT KEEP UP WITH THE MARCH. STARVATION DIETS, ALLOWING SOME FIRES AT NIGHT TO COOK WHAT EVER FOOD WE HAD - THEY GAVE OUT SOME WEAK (KATUEFEL OR POTATO) SOUP. WE WOULD ADD SOME WILD DANDELIONS THAT WE SCOOPED UP FROM THE GROUND. THEY ALSO GAVE US A SLICE OF BREAD, WHICH YOU SWORE WAS MADE FROM SAWDUST, BUT WAS FILLING.

BUT THE WORST FEAR THAT STOOD MOST IN THE MINDS OF THE POW'S WAS THE FACT THAT ALTHOUGH THEY FELT THEY WERE SAFER IN LARGE NUMBERS, IT WAS NOT SO. THERE WERE WIDE-SPREAD RUMORS OF POW'S BEING SHOT AT AND UPON BY OVER ZEALOUS GUARDS, POW'S SHOT TRYING TO ESCAPE AND THE EVER DECREASING NUMBER OF POW'S IN THE EVERYDAY COUNT. THEN THAT SOME COULD NOT KEEP-UP WITH THE MARCH BECAUSE OF WEAKNESS IN BODY PARTS, BLISTERS, "THE RUNS" (DIARRHEA & DYSENTARY) ETC. AND THE GENERAL FEELING THAT WE WOULD NOT SURVIVE AT ALL. BUT THANKS TO THE EVER PRESENT SPIRIT OF OUR LEADERS, OUR PRAYERS AND OUR "BUDDY SYSTEM" (HELP CARRYING FELLOW POW'S, DOUBLING UP CARRYING WHAT LITTLE SUPPLIES WE HAD, KEEPING FRIENDLY CHATTER AND PLUS CURSING THE GUARDS - WE MANAGED TO SURVIVE THE ORDEAL - BUT THEN AGAIN, ALMOST-.

WE WERE FINALLY LIBERATED BY AN ADVANCED GUARD OF RUSSIANS AND AFTER MUCH SHELLING BY THEIR ARTILLERY, THEY SURROUNDED OUR WHOLE COLUMN AND THE GERMANS SURRENDERED - THEN THE ARDOUS TASK OF PROVING TO THE RUSSIANS THAT WE WERE AMERICAN POW'S AND NOT GERMAN SOLDIERS.

THE AMERICANS, WHO WERE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ELBE RIVER AS PER AGREEMENT WITH THE ALLIES AND RUSSIANS, THAT THEY WOULD MEET AT THIS JUNCTION - AFTER A DAY OR SO WE FINALLY CONVINCED THE RUSSIANS THAT WE WERE POW'S AND WE WERE THEN RETURNED TO THE ALLIED CONTROL (AMERICANS).

WE WERE THAN TREATED WITH HOT SHOWERS, CLEAN CLOTHES, HOT MEALS AND SENT TO HOSPITALS FOR FURTHER TREATMENTS AND LASTLY HOME TO THE U.S.A.

FOOTNOTE: FINAL COUNT OF ALL POW'S AT HALLE-TORÇAU CAMP WAS PUT AT BETWEEN 1000-1100 POW'S.