



South Australians at war – transcript – PRG 244/3

Diary of Keith Dodd

Diary describing experiences as a prisoner of war during World War Two

Transcription of selected text

Transcribed by Susie van der Sluys, June 2002

Introduction

Diary summary

I have kept an account of my experiences of more than two years as a prisoner of war, firstly in Italian hands and later under the hospitality of the Reich, but all into the fact that I summarised everything in the life of POW even down to the types of meals I ate, the diary has become rather unwieldy for a reader, and I do hope that my friends will have the opportunity of reading a little, and so I will summarise the most important extracts of these pages.

A fitting introduction would, I think, be the account of the trip from Malta, from which we "failed to return".

It was on the morning of the 21st June, that we were called to the Operations Room on the Luqa (LUQA) aerodrome at Malta. The target was "two merchant ships in convoy, with an escort of one cruiser travelling from Sicily to Tripoli", and we taxied out at 0900.

At the first attempted takeoff, Bill (Smyth) slipped up & we almost cleaned up a couple of Wellington aircraft on the perimeter. We taxied into position again & took off O.K. carrying 18" torpedo, but upon becoming airborne discovered that the Air Speed indicator was U/S, so turned in to make a really good landing under dangerous circumstances as the ASI is the all-important indicator for landing. Upon taxiing to the side of the runway, the ground crew found the trouble -- an oversight on their part in leaving the pilot-head cover on. After calling them some not too polite names we taxied onto the long run-way for a third attempt to take-off.

On this occasion we got away, although we should have landed again, because the formation had by this time set course and stragglers had been instructed not to leave, as the fighter menace was rather acute from Pantellaria - but we went.

After 15 minutes on course we caught up with the formation and jockeyed into position in the first flight behind S/Ldr. Lynn.

On E.T.A. we sighted smoke on the horizon on the port side, so we turned on, finding that they were the objective, ailing line astern with the cruiser leading. The S/Ldr was a little too keen though and continued on making a straight run in from about 12 miles out, instead of turning to make an evasive run in at 2000 yards as we were taught in training. Of course we could do nothing but follow line astern, instead of in VIC formation, and as we closed in they opened up from the stern deck of the cruiser with all they had. I saw the S/Ldr's kite



go straight up with the starboard engine pouring black smoke. Now you must imagine the following incidents taking place within about five seconds. We made our drop at about 1000 yards with a fixed screen of explosive black puffs between us and the vessels, and upon Bill calling "torp. gone" my attention was attracted, 6th sense I guess, above us, to find that a Beaufort was positioned immediately above us about 10 feet away flying with us. The torpedo looked rather impressive there so close, and it seemed as if my eyes attracted it's released, as it left its supports at that moment. This is, more or less, the last I remember, as I sat in my observers seat (where I should not have been) with my Mae West (or life jacket) flat when it should have been semi inflated. It appears that the torpedo crashed us again, our speed being 200 m.p.h. at that time, & I was thrown sideways through the perspex as the kite went in. This was at 1105 & as it turned out afterwards I was unconscious for 20 minutes. As I was thrown out the catch on my Mae West, must have hit the aircraft, which coned taking inflated at & this brought about my safety. As I came to the strange thought came to me in the way of the query I felt somehow that I was not alive that as I cannot express the feeling for the first 10 minutes I will not attempt it. I could not see clearly that something seemed to catch my eye, & as I cleared my sight I saw one of the merchant ships 1/2 mile away: it seemed to be rolling violently, after which it suddenly turned up with either the bow or the stern completely out of the water & sank quickly.

I realised that I was injured (I had 2 1/2 months in hospital afterwards) but knew that I had to swim if I wished to be rescued, so I commenced with my one good leg & arms to endeavour to get to the dinghys & life boats from the sunken vessel. Finally I was picked up and rowed over to the cruiser where they took me below together with the survivors from the merchant ships. Both were sunk that day for a loss of 3 aircraft, so I have found out since.

After having been made comfortable I was brought a pay book of another "aviatori" who turned out to be Fred (WALLS) my WOP/AG, but I never saw him until we landed in Tripoli that night at 2000, when we were both put in an ambulance to be taken to the military hospital.

A full account is unnecessary but Fred's whole body was burnt black from the explosion of a petrol tank I guess. We were both attended by the Italian M.O. who had no anaesthetics to help him. The operations were therefore not a picnic but we were fixed up and retired to a ward where we slept soundly.

Astea in Tripoli was a strange & new experience, although short for Fred, who suffering from extreme loss of blood, burns & shock, passed away on Friday, June 26th at 1735 and was buried in a nearby cemetery. I felt his absence greatly as he was a wonderful pal & he and I had always gone well together. It was just as well he passed on then, because in the condition he was, it was agony for him & under that care there was no hope for him at all.

The sisters in the hospital were rather strange, the orderlies lazy and useless, and the food consisted simply of rice with no flavouring whatsoever. We were issue with bread but nothing to spread it with, and so I was very discontented. There were Tommies in the ward, who had been captured in the desert. Of course, the Iti's went mad with delight upom hearing the day after we arrived, that Tobruk had fallen to the Axis troops.



On thurs. 2nd July a number of us left Tripoli for Naples on the hospital ship the "GRADISCA" which was really clean, well equipped & staffed with efficient Italian nurses & doctors. Our main trouble was making ourselves understood as it was on very rare occasions that we came into contact with an English speaking Italian.

We came across the Mediterranean very slowly, authoring course frequently, finally passing through the straits of Messina on the afternoon of July 4th, and sighting the Bay of Naples early the next morning. The mountains which surrounded the city were most impressive, with Mount Vesuvius set in their midst, from which ensued billowy clouds of white smoke into an otherwise an azure blue sky. As we passed down the rows of ships into the docks no real damage by bombing could be noticed, but it was certainly a haven for ships of all shapes and sizes from small ferries to battleships and submarines, about six of latter being moored between merchant ships.

Extract from page 7

Many patients were left as long as a fortnight & in a few cases more, without having received any attention whatsoever to quite serious wounds. There was an Aussie Padre there ~~who~~ had been captured in April 1941, who knew Alf Whelan my cobbler, who was captured at the same time, and also a fellow Claude Miller of 2nd/8th Field Ambulance, who worked in the S.A. Gas Co., at home. He was most generous to me & being a British orderly, he was able to afford me some butter and jam to use with my bread, and also a tooth brush & tooth paste, with a few English cigarettes to keep me going. These things meant more to me at this time than £100 would have at home, because one had never dreamed that there was a ~~people~~ nation, which had so little food and such a small variety of food with which to feed its people; and we later found that the civilian people even in 1942 were very poorly fed indeed.

Extract from page 8

On the 18th of July I received my first issue of Red Cross Food Parcels, the quantity being 2 parcels to 3 men so of course we were just like children opening their stockings on Xmas morning, not knowing what to expect. The thrill was terrific, the effects of receiving the parcels being miraculous on the spirits of the lads in the wards.

Extract from pages 9-11

After bidding Claude Miller & the British orderlies "farewell" we left the place on 22nd July and went to the Caserta Railway Station by ambulance where we boarded a hospital train going north.

Garfield Jeffery (D.C.L.I) and Ted Bedford (D.L.I.) were my closest friends and we were able to stay together until late in Sept.

As we left Caserta we could see MT. VESUVIUS in the distance, and in the afternoon we passed thro' MARCIANISE & hit the coast at FORMIA which was later to be a battlefield for our troops at the time of the invasion on the west coast of France. A short description of what the countryside was like should not go astray here.



The country appeared very rugged, but in spite of this every square foot of available ground was under cultivation, the main growth being flax, corn maize, lucerne, and field root vegetables, tended in most cases by elderly women and children. All the crops looked most healthy, altho' the few vineyards we saw were untidy and straggled with climber vines.

The next morning we had a long stop at PARMA where some of our fellows were taken off, after which we passed on thro' FIDENZA, and FLORENZUOLA to PIACENZA where we left the train at 1300. We were driven in ambulances just outside the town to a temporary hospital called ALBERONI which looked most unimpressive from outside but turned out to be 100% better than Caserta. It was used for a few wounded Serbs & Greeks who were awaiting repatriation.

The Sisters of Mercy there were more like one would expect to come in contact with and the M.O. was a little human compared with the previous one. It was originally a monastery building, but had been partly converted, the young priests still using the remainder of the building for their studies. The meals were a great improvement as we received tomatoes & lettuce with our meat for one meal and potatoes & beans with the other on most occasions. Apart from this tho' the meals were the same, with nothing of a sweet nature and still eating dry bread.

They provided for themselves and us in the monastery having a few cows and a small orchard about 100 ´ 150 yds. in which we were permitted to walk for a few hours per day.

After a few days in this place I became very friendly with a Serbian Lieutenant and his Colonel, who were attempting to learn English, so for the duration of my stay there I became their tutor, for which they were very kind to me. At the same time I commenced learning Italian, and at the time I left I was able to read the war communique to the boys. It was amazing to note the loop holes in their propoganda, a good example being the July convoy which sailed from Gibraltar to (?). In the first report about the attack by the Axis on this convoy they claimed 21 merchant ships sunk, the following days' paper making individual claims which totalled up to 15 out of a total convoy of 21 ships. The third day one could count 12 claims, while on the fourth day a final mention was made on which the Axis forces had sunk 10 enemy merchant ships of a convoy of 21 ships with 42 aircraft shot down too.

It was really amazing to see the many contradictory statements which appeared in their communique. During my stay of 6 weeks there we received parcel issues on two occasion, each of them being one between two patients.

Extract from pages 11-12

On the 7th Sept. we were, without notice, told that we were leaving camp, 21 of us departing the same day for the main hospital in Piacenza. In the afternoon of the same day we left Piacenza by train, travelling in 3rd class coaches via Parma to a siding near BOLOGNA where we were picked up on a transport & taken to Camp no. 73. As we pulled up outside the camp the fence was crowded with fellows wearing only shorts and boots and as brown as berries, who flocked us for news as we came into the camp. There were no permanent buildings there, but canvas tents large enough for about six men in which there were 20 men sleeping & living.



The rations there were 1/2 pint of thick stew, 200 grams of bread, a small bunch of grapes and a piece of cheese about 1 1/2" square per man for each day. It sounds meagre, and it was meagre, in fact "bloody meagre", and I think in my stay of 3 weeks there with no parcels I was more miserable than I have ever been in my life. I lost about 1 stone in weight as did most other people and the tempers were very short indeed, fights occurring quite often. It was a crime to hear the arguments over food, much being stolen by some of the weaker-willed; everyone seemed to be depressed, rumours were wild and discipline slack, 2000 men being situated in an area about 200 yds ´ 200 yds.

Extract from pages 13-14

It was on Mon. 28th Sept. that finally we left camp 13 in extremely bad weather, although it cleared up during the night to dawn upon a beautifully fine day on which to conclude our trip. Our first train took us to VERONA where we changed & travelled first class to VENICE in a train which was extremely overcrowded with people treading all over each other in the corridors, while we enjoyed the comfort of a 1st class compartment with two guards. It really astounded the civilians to see us eating chocolate, biscuits, etc. from our parcel, which items of food apparently were great luxuries for them.

After a wait for 1/2 an hour at VENICE we boarded another train and travelled 3rd class to TRIESTE, where we arrived in daylight. From there to UDINE thence to CHIVEDALE by train, 3rd class again, where we left the train and were escorted to camp 57 at the foot hills of the Alps about 30 to 40 miles from the coast.

They searched us very thoroughly before we went through the gates but never located my diary, a portion of which was sewn under my stripes the rest being in my sock.

Extract from pages 17-18

The offences which one was liable to get 30 days for were just not offences at all, but I will quote a few cases I know just to give an idea how spiteful and petty they were.

On many occasions even when offenders were not within hearing distance of the bugle in the morning or evening, they would be charged and sent to "boob" for not standing to attention and paying compliment to the Fascist flag which flew outside command.

One day when an Italian officer was in the camp a Kiwi was standing outside a bungalow with a mug of tea in his hand & he stood to attention as the officer walked past, whereupon the latter called a Caribineri (King's Soldiers) & sent him to prison for 30 days, the charge being "Offering assault to an officer." Supposedly the Kiwi was about to throw the mug of tea at him. I often think it was a pity he didn't because he would have felt that they had a reason for sentencing him then.

Extract from pages 20-21

It was in the last days of October that the one and only large scale attempt to escape was made from the camp. Nineteen fellows went out through a tunnel 118 feet long dug at a depth of about 12 to 15 feet from no. 5 hut in our compound out behind the sentry box in



the field. When digging it they had to use football bladders to replace the lack of oxygen once they got about 30 feet along the tunnels.

It was a futile attempt though because inside a week they had all 19 back in the boob, but they certainly fooled the old Colonel who had stated that it was impossible to escape from the camp. It caused a hell of a flap in the camp and we were kept out of the huts all one day and half of the next while they searched our huts (God knows what for, but they took our table-knives for some reason, to return them about a week later).

It was these fellows who found out how hard the Itis. could be in the boob for they chained them & whipped some of them, attempting to get information which would enable them to charge the escapees with larceny which meant 12 months in a civilian gaol.

After this episode, we were turned out of our huts every Monday morning with all our kit etc. while the floor boards were taken up to look for more tunnel attempts, but none were ever found altho' one stood completed for the whole time we remained there. We also lost many privileges thro' this attempt as well as being locked in our compound for three weeks after it.

The Italians took this as an opportunity of enforcing certain regulations, which they said were reprisal measures after ill treatment of Italians in British hands. They sent out in November working parties of New Zealanders simply because Italian prisoners in Australia had been sent to N.Z. to work. They sewed red square patches on our tunics, trousers, shirts and pull-overs because the Italians in Egypt had had patches sewn into the British battle dress which they had to be supplied with because the Italian Red Cross did not send clothing to their prisoners. Of course one can see that it was necessary to sew these patches into the British clothing in places like Egypt so near to the front lines, so that the Itis could not escape and pose as British soldiers, but even if it was done to us, it was so ridiculous because our uniform would be recognised in Italy & besides if we wished to rid ourselves of the red patches all we had to do was tear them off.

Extract from page 22

On Saty 7th November I received my first cablegram from home, sent on 28th July, followed up by 15 letters, the first 15 written, by Mary, and received on 12th Nov. This was the commencement of a wonderful run of mail for the duration of my stay in 57 camp; as I received 38 out of the first 41 written from home, and very regular letters from Mary. I even got 35 letters written to me from home to England, which were re-addressed by RAAF Base Post Office in Blighty (24 in one batch and 11 in another).

During the last few months there I seldom missed a mail and there were about 4 to 5 mails per week at that time. The only parcels I received were 2 cigarette parcels from Australia House, England but I was in no need of a clothing parcel as Alf Whelan had set me up quite well in that line. I sent repeated cables to home thro' the Vatican City, but found that they took the same course and time as the letters, so I never sent any more after discovering that.

Extract from page 23



Following this perhaps I should write a little about the food we ate and give an idea of what our diet consisted of, with & without the Red Cross Food parcels. Our daily ration from the Italians was: 200 grams of wholemeal bread, approx 80 grams of rice or macaroni, 80 grams of vegetable and sufficient coffee (horrible artificial coffee) for one brew per day, plus a weekly ration of 100 grams of cheese, and two spoons of sugar. This worked out to about 13 ozs. of rations per day but with the macaroni and rice we received about ½ pint of water, coloured and flavoured with tomato purine & all which gave either dish the only flavouring it had. This means that apart from the equivalent of a two really good serve of soup for a course in a three course meal at home (and by a "really good serve" I mean in quantity only) The only other edible per day was this small bread roll. So it can be seen that when we had no Red Cross food to eat we got exceptionally hungry, in fact even with the extra 10 lbs. of food in a parcel we still felt the pinch. One would restrain oneself wonderfully for possibly the first three days of the week until the food box began to get low, and then the burning desire for sweet stuffs would get the better of one, resulting in the spooning of condensed sweetened milk, jam, margarine, etc. leaving the rest of the week with nothing to spread on the bread, the biscuits by this time having been demolished completely.

Extract from pages 24-25

I feel sure now though, that upon speaking to any POW of this war, you will be told that never has such a humane or life preserving society done so much in every way that is important for the protection and comfort of human beings, as the International Red Cross Society and St. John's Ambulance. I feel that any one of us who return from this life should credit this organisation for their safe return to their people, and thank the Lord that it was in existence, especially while they were prisoners of the Italians. We had a canteen in the camp, but the only nourishment able to be bought there was dried fruit on occasions, powders of many descriptions being the only other edibles, but they were artificial and absolutely useless.

Extract from pages 28-29

Although food was not plentiful, I was determined to have a good Xmas as I felt sure it would be my only one as a POW, so I saved all sorts of small items, such as the crusts off my bread for about a fortnight to enable me to make a couple of bread puddings (one with cocoa and the other with orange peel as flavouring), and I never opened my Xmas parcel until Xmas eve.

It contained—chocolate biscuits, chocolate, 1 lb. Xmas cake, 1 lb. Xmas pudding (mixed fruit), 1 tin milk (small size), 2 lb. tins of meat & veg., 10 oz. of bacon, 8 oz. tin of salmon, 2 tins of cheese, 1 4 oz. block of sugar, small tin of sweets, ½ lb. of butter, 8 oz. tin of syrup and a small tin of fish paste. We endeavoured to make the day as pleasant as possible, but one easily over-estimates his capacity in these places, as I had an extremely big dinner and left myself too full to eat even the tiniest morsels for the remainder of the day. In the afternoon and evening I had some red bulk wine to drink (about 2 pints) which was not very potent but made me feel quite happy to finish the evening leading a sing song in the hut.

Extract from pages 29-30



The only real bit of excitement we had throughout the month of January, was on Jan. 25th, two days after the fall of Tripoli. A strong rumour started in the morning followed by a story in the afternoon, from a fellow who had heard it announced in no. 5 compound, that Italy had capitulated. Of course everyone was mad with excitement, they laughed, sang and yelled, ate heavily their newly received parcels until the compound leader about 2 hours later denounced the rumour, this seeming to knock the bottom out of everything; so much so in fact that hardly a sound was heard from our hut for the rest of the afternoon, and nearly everyone was in bed by 7 o'clock that night. For two or three months until our troops got into northern Tunisia, there were countless unfounded rumours floating through the camp, and it was not until the invasion of Sicily that the really persistent and silly rumours stopped spreading. The Stalingrad evacuation by Jerry was the most spirited news we received in February quoting tremendous losses of Axis personnel and equipment.

Extract from page 33

The day on which Cec. arrived, I was fortunate enough to be chosen in the Australian team to play in the first test match against England, which we won after a four hour play. Following this several matches were played between New Zealand, Australia and England, also between the compounds, and again on one occasion (it only took one to find out how poor I was) I represented the compound. In addition to this we used to run a hut league in four grades of cricket.

Extract from pages 36-37

In the early months of the year, the Iti's started to bring beer into the canteen so of course the boys, having plenty of lire, privates receiving 30 lire per month and Sgts. 45 lire, and very little else of good value to buy, rushed the canteen on the three days of the week, when the beer was available. It was quite a pleasant mild drink, although, as is always the case, there were some who could afford to buy sufficient to have a "day out", and so a few unsteady people would be found in the afternoons. Everyone had their days for celebration, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, one or two year POW celebrations etc., so most of the fellows had a "day out" at some time or other (No, I won't deny it, I had my turn on a couple of occasions too.) Later the Italian wines started coming into the camp too, but the boys went a bit far with it, so they were made to form a queue on occasions when it was sold, and allowed only a certain amount per person. They soon got over this by getting their non drinking coppers to get in the queue, and thus collect extra in that way, so they carried on their drinking parties.

One of these had a very catastrophic ending on April 20th, when Sox Symonds, a West Aussie got a little merry (not drunk but just happy) and went over to a cricket match in no. 2 compound to do a little barracking. A Carabinieri saw this crowd of fellows sitting on a pile of timber, so went over and ordered them off. As they left the timber, they continued barracking, Sox being well known as a champion at this, but of course their language was bad, as 95% of the language was when barracking the batsmen or bowlers, or a fielder who should miss a catch, however, difficult it was.

This gave the Carabinieri an idea that they were possibly abusing him, as most of the Iti's knew two or three of the worst, most used swear words (who doesn't get to know the bad



language first when learning to speak a foreign lingo) and he came over & picked on Sox to take him off to the boob. Well at this, a couple of the fellows grabbed his arms to lead him over to the hut, but this proved the wrong thing to do, because he was not drunk, and when he struggled to get away I guess the Caribineri thought he was too much under the influence—he told the fellows to stand back & as they did, he took his rifle off his shoulder, cocked it, and shot Sox in the heart, with a load of grape-shot, which simply blew a great hole in his body. As he fell he mouthed a horrible curse on the Italians, after which he was alive for only about 30 seconds. This was the most callous murder ever committed I think, and so unwarranted too.

Extract from page 39

On 21st June '43, Cec. & I had a celebration of the first anniversary of our being captured, hoping and fully expecting that it would be the last, and remembering the lads of our two crews who had passed on that day a year ago. To these boys I wrote a poem, which I hope to have printed when I return to England, so that I may send their peoples a copy as a tribute to these dear unfortunate ones.

Extract from pages 41-42

The morning of July 26th brought us the news that Mussolini had left Italy, and the King has once again taken control of the country, Royalists having been placed in the high official positions.

Within a week around the end of July we heard all sorts of wild rumours about capitulation, the Pope's ambassador in England, Turkey declaring war, Sicily being finished and others with no founding whatsoever.

Above Cec. & I in the hut were "Sandy" Jones, a Kittyhawk pilot, aged 20 from Melbourne, and "Chuck" Dauphin, a WOP/AG off Wellington's from Ontario in Canada, and we became very friendly with these two before long. Chuck was sent to boob when he arrived at 57, because he had a piece of an old palliasse with him, the charge being "destroying a palliasse". They searched them very thoroughly when they arrived taking maps, emptying out surplus hard food and of course piercing all tinned foods. I don't think I mentioned that fact before, but another futile effort by the Italians, was the piercing of all tinned food in the parcels, to ensure that we did not escape. Of course meats, fish, vegetables and some small articles would not keep then for any length of time, but the necessary items which one would carry if attempting to escape were chocolate, biscuits, milk, oatmeal, cocoa and tea, none of which were affected by the piercing of the containers and contact with the air. In the winter, most meats, we found, would keep about 5 or 6 days, but in the warm weather only two or three days, fish usually being eaten on the day of the parcel issue; despite this nuisance piercing of tins though, we were inconvenienced very little, because articles were handed by people on Monday to a persons in another compound who would return it on their issue day possibly Wed. or Thurs. On August 2nd, the Ita's started issuing each man with $\frac{1}{7}$ of a parcel per day for every day of the week, to stop food hoarding for any purpose, but of course we overcame that too. We grouped ourselves in sevens, went down and received 2 or 3 articles each from a parcel, and upon returning to the hut reassembled the parcel, which one man took each day, those who were not out of issue food waiting until later on in the week, in preference of those who had none left. The



weather was pleasant, and quite hot at times, so of an evening after "lights out", Jim Wilson 2 Kiwis and I would sit outside the hut discussing—yes our experiences with the fair sex.

Extract from pages 43-51

On the 18th Aug. we received the news that Sicily was completely in our hands, the surviving Axis forces having crossed the straits of Messina to defend Italy from the "Allied hordes".

Upon discovering that Chuck's birthday was on Aug. 22nd, I arranged with him and Sandy for a drinking session, so we bought up 6 bottles of Marsala wine and one Vermut, and after getting thirsty on the 20th, & polishing off 4 of them, we had to restock for the 22nd. It was a really enjoyable evening, everyone being quite merry at the conclusion, the only hitch being that a parade was called for 2300 hours, on which I had to be watched rather carefully. This had become a popular pastime of the Itis, about this time, parade being called on frequent occasions at varying hours during the night, usually 2200, 2300, 0200 or 0300 hours, the former two times being most frequent. The entertainments committee put on a variety show in the middle of August, in which Cec. took a feminine part as a "hula" girl, the result being very effeminate indeed, and he danced and played his part rather well.

Rumours were rife in the last days of August and early days of September, although nothing ever seemed to come of them. It was on Sept. 2nd that we received only one parcel between two for the first time since February, so it was a wonderful run while it lasted. The following week we received the same again, the last of the parcels in the magazine at 57.

On Sept. 8th after a pleasant, but quiet and rumour-less day we received the long awaited news. I will here quote my diary in full: "After listening to a Band Recital in the Rec. Hut we returned to the hut at 2030, just ½ an hour before "lights out" Suddenly, a roaring, cheering sound of voices could be heard from over the wire, whereupon everyone rushed outside someone saying "Anyone would think the show has finished." I went over to the wire and asked the sentry the reason for all the jubilation, to which he replied "Pace! Pace! la guerra é finito," a most easily understood reply which I think needs no translation. It certainly didn't for me, so I rushed back and told the boys what he said, although by that time the whole camp was agog with excitement. Cheering, yelling and singing could be heard in every direction. Shortly after, we were called on parade, when RS/M Wilson officially informed us that Italy had capitulated, the armistice having been signed."

"Everyone then retired to their beds, but no one slept well, because the situation seemed unbelievable, freedom being only a matter of days where a few hours before it had been looked upon, as something to come in a few months, when Rome had been captured."

"Before Cec. and I went to bed, we invited Chuck & Sandy down for supper a real knock-down supper, and so even we celebrated in our small way. Of course everyone went quiet then—I guess they felt, as I did, wishing for peace and quiet, to try and work it all out in my mind."



The next day was strangely different, although rather than become excited about the situation everyone was still inclined to look upon the situation with careful thought. We were called on parade as usual, when we were informed of the procedure we were expected to adopt, if and when Jerry should approach the camp. In the evening we were told that parties were to be formed to leave the camp with Italian guides, but nothing came of it, so we gathered at the recreation hut to enjoy a "Victory Concert". At all times upon hearing a patriotic song I feel very strange, and experience shivers up my spine, but nothing has ever affected me more deeply than hearing our national anthem played on that occasion, the first time for 15 months.

On Sept. 10th everyone paraded in marching order at 0730, but after standing out on the parade ground until 1300 hours we were told that there was "no immediate danger, and we were to remain calm in our huts and await further developments". Everyone of course was highly strung at the thought of leaving the camp, and upon being told that it was cancelled, became most discontented and unhappy. As we had been told that we were going to Venice, we did not attempt to carry a great deal of food or clothing, leaving the majority of this in the hut, but we regretted this fact later. When we returned to our huts we found that the Palestinians and Indians had completely looted them, leaving nothing in the way of personal belongings or food.

One may incorrectly assume that as the armistice had been signed we would have been treated much better by the Italians, and allowed many privileges, but I can state that the opposite occurred. A notice worded as follows was issued by the Colonel on Sept. 10th: "Although the armistice has been signed by Italy and the Allied nations you are still POW's in this camp to be protected by the Italians until the British troops arrive. The following orders must be obeyed implicitly:"

1. The sentries have been ordered to fire upon groups of more than 4 POW's gathering at a distance of less than 50 ½ metres from the trip wire.
2. Also will they fire upon any POW who attempts to speak with or barter with any Italian soldier.

"These orders are issued to ensure your safety and must be obeyed."

This will give an indication that not Italian Royalists but Fascists were responsible for these orders issued "for our benefit".

Following this, camp life seemed to resume its usual trend, inter-compound cricket and baseball matches keeping us entertained during the day, while band recitals were the thing in the evenings.

On Sept. 12th, the first news to reach us when we left our huts for morning parade was that about 12 truck-loads of Jerries, even accompanied by an ambulance, had arrived at the camp, so it looked as if our promised warning when Jerry came into the district, had been rather neglected. Before long the guards in the boxes had been replaced by Jerries. Every guard box was occupied, every alternate one accommodating three Jerries and a machine gun, whereas before each other sentry box had not been occupied. In the course of the day we heard all manner of rash rumours about the rebels and their activities, one steady rumour being that a rebel and civilian movement was afoot to free us that night. Actually



there were skirmishes in the vicinity during the night with machine guns and rifle fire occurring from the boxes, but nothing happened of real importance, except that a Jerry patrol of about 40 men went out and rounded up several hundred rebels in Chivedale.

The following morning (Sept. 13th) proved to be our last day in C.C. no. 57, for, after being called out for the first parade at 1100, we were paraded again at 1130, when we were instructed to pack in readiness to leave "under German escort". There was great controversy about the direction of movement, although I feel sure that, firstly, the majority considered that we were being escorted south, and secondly that if we were going north there would be ample chances for escape.

Because of the fact that we entertained these ideas, we packed only lightly, taking whatever food we had, but only a very scanty amount of clothing. They separated us into nationalities before departing, but we four boys wished to stay together, so Sandy and I went into the same group as the Canadians. The Aussies and Kiwis left the camp first, followed after an hour or so by the Tommies, which left Palestinians, Indians, South Africans, and Canadians, who spent another three hours waiting, as it proved, for another train. During the afternoon, we raided the kitchen, put on a brew of tea and then made a stew, which I tended. It was the thickest and tastiest stew ever made in 57 I think because it had sufficient vegetables for about five dixies crammed into one, with tomato purine and beans cooked separately and poured in afterwards. We finally left the camp at about 1700, which meant that I had been 12 months less 16 days in that camp without having been outside the gates once—I can assure you I thought of this too, as we marched down the road, on both sides of which lay prone Germans behind machine guns, at intervals of 10 to 20 yards. The weather was pleasant, making quite an enjoyable march to the railway siding, where we were herded into cattle trucks, 50 men and their kit being actually pushed in, until they became settled in a space 25' × 10'. It certainly seems impossible but we did fit in, and we even slept in them too. At about 1800 we left arriving in UDINE about 30 minutes later. On the way into Udine, we tried the truck door and to our surprise found that it was closed but not locked. The weather was hot, so most of us were wearing nothing more than shirts and shorts, but upon realising that here was a chance to escape we donned our long trousers, pullovers, tunics and great coats to await our chance. Our party was all arranged (Chuck, Cec, Sandy & myself) and all except a couple in the truck were going, shortly leaving UDINE.

While in the above station, one of the Palestinians decided to have a look through the door, but upon sliding it 2" or 3" open, he found himself looking at a German soldier, who yelled at him to close the door, threatening to turn a machine gun on the truck if the door was opened again. Then of course he made sure that our door was locked and wired from outside, so that robbed us of a really good chance of making a break, all through someone's impatience. Naturally we could not manage to get the door open again, and there was no other means of escape, except wriggling through a cut-away portion near the top of either side, which meant that one could not easily look where one was jumping. Of course there were some who got away by this means, but there were also some killed and some injured through landing on bad ground.

I have felt always, as a prisoner in Italy or Germany, that given a 50% chance of getting away, and, more important, having somewhere to go, after having escaped, I would take the opportunity, when it offered. I have not believed that where the chances of getting



injured or killed are great, that it is worthwhile risking one's life when one has escaped from a dangerous crash and has every chance of returning home safely.

We had of course changed our minds, after being told at the rail siding near the camp that we were Germany-bound and not on the south bound train.

In the late evening we entered more mountainous country, finally passing through the ARNOLDSTEIN PASS into AUSTRIA. We had, in most cases little or no sleep due to the congestion in the truck, so were able to appreciate and enjoy (yes even at that stage) the beauty and quiet of the countryside through which we were travelling. The lakes nestled in amongst the high mountains, made a most brilliant spectacle in the bright light of a high moon.

The first we were able to set our eyes upon in the early morning following, was WILACH, which was surrounded by hills, appearing very much like parts of South Australia, and one could not help but notice the outlook of the people whom we saw on the station. They were similar to the people we saw in the remainder of Austria through which we travelled. They seemed all well-dressed, happy-go-lucky and most cheerful people, and always had a kind word for any of the German speaking Palestinians in our truck, who would question them occasionally.

During the morning ~~when~~ we noticed many working parties of Britishers on the railway lines, as well as many French and Dutch workers.

Then at SPITTAL-MILLSTATTERSEE, at 0910 we left the train, to find that on the opposite line, between us and the station platform, was ~~on~~ a train-load of Italians being brought through to camps in Germany, from Greece and Albania. We found out later that any of them who wished to fight on for the "Fascist cause" and the "salvation of Italy" were given their chance, but most of these too ended up in POW camps in Germany, because they would not fight—they never did have any guts for war anyhow, especially when they were losing. We, that knew anything of the Italian language, of course abused these rotters in this train, not that it helped at all, except ease our minds a little, for we did not think much of the Itis at that time. It is the popular opinion now that the Colonel sold us completely, because he received orders from Rome to release us, but he allowed those of a Fascist general to over-rule the former, and held us until Jerry arrived.

We then marched up the road through the out-skirts of the town for about 1/2 an hour arriving at Stalag 18AZ.

Extract from pages 58-63

On the morning of Sept. 22nd, we left the camp at SPITTAL to embark for the Deutschland, marching back through the town in the morning to board the train and leave at 1700 hours. We received 3 days issue of bread and an issue of cheese; there were about 40 of us in our truck this time, the Indians and Air Force personnel being the only ones to leave. The only country we saw before dark was very mountainous, and we passed through many tunnels during the night, one of which was 9 miles long.



There were some more fellows who got away during the night again, but now we were almost into Germany most of the boys were resigned to a further term of imprisonment, because the chances of getting anywhere useful after escape for return to our side were negligible. Incidentally we had our truck door opened by the guard the next morning, and after he locked us in again, we discovered that it was possible to open it with one of the wire bands off the bread cases, so sat around the door in a semi-circle, and admired the countryside all the next day. It would have been difficult to escape, except when the train was moving, and then it was dangerous so we never attempted, figuring that it was better to wait a bit longer and go home whole, than take a chance on going home "holey".

We saw an aerodrome, upon which were dispersed Dornier aircraft in the early morning, but never saw any more during the whole trip. Passed through BALDHAM at 0730 and then FRIEFING at 0900. Then at 0930 we entered LANDSHUT where we had a spell and were able to stretch our legs when we got out to collect some millet soup. Although it was cold in the early morning it fined up to become a very pleasant day, the time being passed pleasantly by us all. At 1230 we arrived at REGENSTAUF, where I struck trouble. We were all told to get out, but I was a little slow as I had to put my boots on, so a bull-headed, over-fed Lieutenant did his block and gave me a helping hand by passing on a terrific smack under the ear which luckily just connected, but not with full force. Having missed a knock-out blow, the old Schickelgruber made an attempt at a second one, but I didn't wait for it. After a brief spell we boarded our "1st class" compartments again for the afternoon, passing through more level country until 1730 when we passed through SCHWANDORF, the next stop being WERNBERG some 40 minutes later. There were many women working in the fields, accompanied by kiddies, the latter being so numerous that one could not help but remark on the success, with which Goebbels' "increase the population" drive had met. WEIDEN saw us at 1645, after which we stopped for oncoming trains at VEISAU, a much larger town than those we had previously seen during the day. The last place at which a name could be distinguished was MARKTREDWITZ at 1830, after which we got the truck swept with some cardboard and got into sleeping positions for the night, and, believe me, once we got our positions there was no room for moving. Sleep came in spasms throughout the night, according to the movement of the train, each stop usually succeeding to awaken us all.

On the morning of 24th we awoke to find ourselves at REISA at 0625, and after stopping for a short time we passed on only a few more miles before stopping in a siding, which was the end of the journey. At 1000 we were taken off the train, and after waiting for some time commenced our march to camp. It was about 3 miles, over which distance we travelled at about half snail's pace until we reached the entrance to STALAG IVB, which we were told was a transit camp for personnel from Italy, and at which we would only remain for a short period before travelling to a Luft camp (for Air Force personnel only). The very thought of it, A LUFT CAMP, but we are still in STALAG IVB at the time of writing this.

We were given, at the gates, a real pep. talk of by the camp commandant's interpreter who told us, "you are British soldiers, and as long as you continue to act as 'us', will be treated fairly and well by ze German authorities." After this we were messed about in really first class style by Jerry until dark when we were shown to Italian tents pitched in one of the compounds, 20 to a tent about 25 feet by 10 feet with insufficient room to stand up straight. During the course of the day we had been searched twice, showered and disinfested, vaccinated and – of all things – had our hair clipped right off. Although the



chest pain from the vac. commenced that night, I can safely say that no one needed rocking to sleep, as we retired on the straw that night.

After having dodged the Itis on so many occasions with my diary, I went as close as I have been, to losing it that day, when a Jerry discovered it during one of the searches. He looked at the first few pages in a rather puzzled manner after which I hastily took it from him, to reverse it and show him the back in which were written addresses only; he was still rather mystified but seemed a little more satisfied although he could not speak English, thank God, so he handed it back to me—my heart beat steady once more. We had noticed during the day that the camp was of fair proportions, and in it were at least two other nationalities—Russians and Dutchmen whom we had seen on fatigue parties.

The following morning we were aroused shortly after 0600 for a parade at 0630, at which time we nearly froze as the weather had changed to the extreme. After parade we waited for the "brew", which turned out to be the famous brand of Ersatz tea, made from herbs, half cold and tasting like time soaked in water. It was really horrible and none of us could drink it as much as we needed a drink.

A stew just like pig-slops, was received at about 1600 (only 5 hours late) followed by hot water at 1900 after which we retired; my diary quotes here that this was the most miserable day I had spent as a POW, and I recall vividly that I was not filled with confidence at the prospects of being a "Kriegsgefangener" in comparison to having been a "prigionero di guerra."

There were about 600 airmen, who had been shot down recently over Germany, in the huts in the same compound, and I might say that they, at that time caused us to lose a lot of our "Air Force pride", which we have not regained, because although as new P's.O.W., they were naturally down-hearted and low in spirits, their utter disregard for themselves in every way, and complete dejectedness in their attitude confounded us greatly. They were mostly Englishmen, with a few Aussies, Canadians and Kiwis, and wore brevets which we had not previously seen, namely E for Flight Engineers B for bomb-aimers and N for navigators, the latter two being the part of the crew to perform the tasks which were previously both done by the Observer. The navigator appeared to be almost a fully-trained observer, while the bomb-aimer needed only a few months training before qualifying, although fully trained observers were being used for either job when necessary.

Extract from pages 66-69

The camp area at IVB was about 2½ times as large as 57 camp, the strength in personnel being about 9,000–10,000 prisoners. It was divided into four sections A, B, C & D, each having a North and South division on either side of the road through the camp running from command in the west to the eastern extent of the camp.

"A & B north" was one compound of nine huts (all huts in the camp faced north and south), the compound area being used for rugby and soft-ball with a basket-ball court and two volley-ball courts near the fences. The huts were occupied by transit personnel and the compound referred to as the Transit compound.



"A & B south" was also one compound, called the French compound, the huts being inhabited by French, Dutch, Italians and others, but no British. On the grounds of this compound stood the camp soccer pitch, as well as two volley-ball courts. The two above-mentioned compounds were directly opposite and the same size.

Next comes C-North, better known as the RAF compound which was the smallest compound in the camp, holding only four huts, and having an area which was too small for any sports except two volley-ball courts and the recreation hut, this being used only as a school-room.

Finally there were compounds D-north and D-south, both army compounds of the same area, which held six huts each. In D-north, was held all athletic meetings, camp cricket and race meetings, the same area being used for all of course, it being about 100 yds by 100 yds. There were again two volley-ball courts, while D-south had an area large enough only for three volley-ball courts, the southern portion being fenced off for use as a small Russian compound. C-south was small like C-North and was occupied by Italians and Russians, the two kitchens and the canteen being in the central C area.

So it can be seen that although for the number of men the area was small, it was utilised to the very fullest extent. For the greater part of our stay in the camp, the whole area was open to us, so one could do plenty of walking when that way inclined.

After having been a fortnight in the camp we received our first parcel issue, one American parcel per man, which was most welcome at that time, for we had not had a full issue since the Armistice in Italy. The two following weeks we received 1/2 Canadian and 1/2 American parcel each after which started the best run of Red Cross parcels we had ever had.

As soon as we became settled in the camp and the parcels started to pour in, we found that even with winter coming on, we were much better off than we had ever been in Italy, and while the new prisoners found the food insufficient, we were quite contented with our lot. The rations were found to be 21 lbs. per person per week as compared with 6 lbs. in Italy. We were not permitted to "brew up" outside, although before the fuel issue commenced we took a chance on occasions.

The routine was somewhat changed from that to which we had become accustomed, hot water being issued from the French cook house at 0600, parade following at 0730, so very few people got up to make an early brew. The evening parade for the compound was held at 1730, an Unteroffizier (Corpl) or Gefreiter (Private) being responsible for the count. It appeared to us that an Unteroffizier in the German army was as important as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Italian army. There was no red tape on parade, in fact it was a very haphazard count, with no discipline regarding dress or drill.

When Jerry ever handled a crowd of men, he always counted in fives, the parade falling in also in fives, which I must say simplified his job a hundredfold.

Perhaps now I should say a little about our living quarters in this camp. Each hut was divided by a double wash room into two barracks, the larger end holding about 210 men and the smaller having a capacity for 190. The "B" end of each hut housing 200 men measured 100' x 40' compared favourably with that in Italy where there were 100 men in a



hut 100' ´ 15'. In our huts in IVB, only one half of the hut was taken up with bunks, which were all 3-tier, the other side of each hut having tables and forms, sufficient to accommodate about ½ of the men, with food racks against the wall. Those who could not obtain a position at a table, were forced to eat on their beds, but we were accustomed to that by this time so we four ate on my bed. There were two stoves in each hut in the central portion with horizontal floor chimneys running to a high chimney in the actual centre of the hut. Over the horizontal chimneys were clothes-horses, so that the heat from the chimneys dried one's washing, in addition to heating the hut.

Extract from pages 69-70

Our rations consisted of soup and potatoes daily, with dry rations, bread, margarine, sugar jam and meat. The soup was different every day although never very tasty, but what would not fatten would always help to fill. We received about 12 potatoes each day which were quite a change to never seeing any, so we enjoyed them until they became just like rice or macaroni to us. The sugar ration was at most the same per day as it was per week in 57 camp, while in addition we received approximately an ounce of margarine per day and turnip jam twice a week. Occasional issues of tinned meat paste were also made, which was poor in quality but good enough for Kriegies.

We realised only through being with these new prisoners how much our capacities had contracted because while we were almost satisfied on these rations and the ½ parcel issue in the first few weeks, they were finding it rather a strain to bear up and keep going—it was their hard time and one could sympathise with them.

We also had the advantage of experience with preparing our meals and allotting so much for each day, as well as knowing just which articles of Red Cross food were most filling or satisfying to the individual. We four, Chuck, Sandy, Cec. and I, decided to pool our cigarettes and smoke together and in this way were able to buy that little extra which made all the difference. It was rather amusing passing one cigarette around to four people but in this way we smoked only 70 or 80 cigarettes per week out of the 200 we received, so spent approximately 120 cigarettes per week on food.

I will give you now an idea of the prices of food in cigarettes in this camp as compared with Italy, the prices here staying at approximately the same for the whole time:

PRICE IN CIGS.			
ARTICLE		IVB	C.C. 57
KLIM MILK	14 oz.	50	150
CONDENSED MILK	16 oz.	40	80
GOLDEN SYRUP	8 oz.	20	40
CANADIAN JAM	16 oz.	30	80
PEEK FREAN'S BISCUITS	8 oz.	20	80



CANADIAN BISCUITS	—	40	120
MIDLOTHIAN OATMEAL	—	25	80
TINNED ENGLISH CHEESE	3 oz.	10	20
COCOA	8 oz.	25	40
SALMON	8 oz.	15	40
ENGLISH JAM	10 oz.	20	60
MEAT & VEGETABLES	16 oz.	30	60
BULLY BEEF	12 oz.	25	80
MEAT ROLL	10 oz.	25	60
BACON	8 oz.	25	60
N.Z. HONEY	16 oz.	35-40	120
BULK BISCUITS (36)		40	120

Extract from page 83

It was on the 20th October that I experienced my first air raid after two years of dodging them. My impressions at the time were:

"The day had been quiet when suddenly the lights went out at 2100 interrupting our game of bridge—an air raid. Everyone trooped outside and about 20 minutes later, it was on in grand style.

We witnessed an attack by two waves of RAF heavy bombers on Leipzig from a distance of about 30 miles. The blow of searchlights weaving on a low cloud patch over the city, the brilliant flashes of the cookies (4000 lb. bombs), light flak dimly discernible, marker flares light as planets, track indicators and fighter flares all made an attractive colour scheme, added to by two or three blazing aircraft diving towards earth. The steady beat of bombers coming in and the heavy flak, accompanied by the terrific explosions of the cookies were a pleasant sound to fit the scene and when the last of the boys passed on and the sounds subsided, the glow of burning fires on the cloud patches left one deeply amazed at the result of ½ an hour's bombing.

The next evening, a pamphlet which had been dropped during the raid was read to us in the camp. I could not make out how that got into camp from Leipzig in less than 24 hours.

Eight days later we were shown a "London Times" newspaper which had somehow got from England to IVB in eleven days (dated 17/11/43 and read to us on 28/11/43). This



gives some idea how even behind barbed wire one is not locked away from everything, altho' very few people know how these things get here.

Extract from page 84

Once again we remembered those of the Great War on Nov. 11th with a service and the usual two minutes silence, wondering all the time how long we had to wait for the day which would mark the conclusion of this struggle.

Extract from pages 86-87

On Dec. 11th the first issue of the "Newtimes" was circulated, followed by the "Newsflash", the former being a wall magazine and the latter a daily sheet by the same editor. This became the first, or I should say the premier camp paper, later having many contemporaries—"Expression" (next most successful) "Observer", "The Brew", "RAF Gen" and "Union Express" (a South African paper).

Extract from pages 88-89

I feel I should mention the conditions prevailing for the Russians in our camp at IVB. Their rations were approximately the same as ours but they did not get any extras at all, whereas our parcels made all the difference to us, therefore one could understand them eating the potato peelings which we threw out and using their spoons on the tins which were thrown into the tin dumps. They also picked up any discarded cigarette butts which at this time were few, but I must not say too much about that for some of our own fellows even picked them up. Most of us saved our butts, using three butts to roll another cigarettes, thus robbing the tobacco manufacturers of their profit. The position improved a little for their Xmas as a collection of food was made resulting in a goodly amount being distributed to them through our "aid to sick committee".

Extract from page 90

Then as we looked 1944 in the face, everyone consoled themselves by saying that whatever our previous disappointments had been, this year would most certainly see the "Krieg firte" and our freedom regained, most people anticipating that our release would come between June & September.

Extract from pages 102-103

On April 25th (ANZAC DAY) a special service was held in the theatre, and followed by a march-past with three ANZAC contingents, followed by an English, Canadian and South African, the salute being taken by one of the Jerry authorities. In the afternoon, Aussie rules exhibition and an ANZAC v North of England rugby league match was cancelled because of unfavourable weather, both eventually being played a week later.

Extract from pages 110-111

Now, when I take a glimpse into the future, the return, after the cessation of hostilities, to home, my native country & those dear ones, who have become ever so much nearer to me



as the days of prison life roll on, I think back into the past, & of those things which made life in peacetime, all that it was to me.

I realise only too fully now that it takes reverses to make one appreciate the commonplace surroundings & unheralded actions which are being performed all day & every day at HOME.

Of all these too, it is the simpler things which one recalls most vividly & affectionately, such as the lounge chair, in the sitting room, the radio, the log fire & my favourite cigarettes, ~~all of these being~~ to provide a homely comfort in the long winter evenings.

On occasions perhaps I would leave this attractive warmth & cosiness of the sitting room to just get wet thro'. Yes, the simple but not silly practice of placing oneself in harmony with nature, to be soaked to the skin by rain, to have one's hair blown by the wind, as it rustles its way thro' the trees & down the road, to walk or rather plod along with the water oozing between one's toes through water-bogged boots along muddy back tracks, across ploughed fields & along the river bank.

I recollect clearly now my meals, the fact of arriving home, seldom on time, to sit down at the table, covered by a lily-white table cloth, with innumerable articles of food at ones command, the clean dishes, the cutlery, the "brew" and the company of those dear parents.

What untold pleasure it would be to re-live, in the midst of this turmoil, & in the heart of enemy territory just one of those days, to have the choice of the tennis courts, or a dip in the (?) or even a few hours at the office to pass away the morning.

Then after lunch, yes that lunch, which was just an accepted small part, unappreciated like the other cogs of a day's happenings, I would have so many things from which to choose, to pass away an agreeable & pleasurable afternoon. A walk through the hills, amidst the birds & animals, a game of football, a spot of cricket or golf a shopping expedition in the city, a visit to friends or a drive in the car, or possibly another of the numerous simplicities which I could decide upon, would render my decision difficult indeed, when attempting to occupy ~~the f myself. for the afternoon~~

Then to return home, discarding the clothes of the afternoon for evening clothes, after a luxuriously hot bath & a cold shower, and a cold meal, well prepared & deliciously flavoured. This would be the prelude to an evening of many possibilities, from an evening at home to one at a night club, but preferably a lively enjoyable dance, a few drinks at the club being the order of the evening on the way to the ball room.

The fiancée of course would accompany me with a party of ten or a dozen friends to swing the time away amidst great joviality ~~of~~ & attractive company.

Then of course as the evening draws to a close, I would be found in the car driving the girl friend home, ~~to express my~~ expressing the pleasure I derived from her sweet company, her excellent partnership as a dancer finally the parting Goodnight darling, thank God for a really pleasant & enjoyable day.