

## THE LAST FLIGHT OF CREW #14 "The Life of a POW"

by Trefry A Ross 765-058

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The Russian soldiers were in a compound next to us. We were separated by a chain link fence about eight feet high. I never heard any Russian speak English or any American speak Russian. Our method of barter was to hold up a pack of name brand American cigarettes, not necessarily a full pack, but to just show what we had, then we would show the number of fingers to signify the amount of cigarettes we would be willing to give for the article the Russians had. It usually was an item that could be used for cooking and eating, a small metal pot or spoons, knives, forks, etc. Some of the more enterprising ones of our group would show a pack of Camels, Lucky Strikes or Chesterfields and then insert the required number of cigarettes agreed upon, however instead of putting good American cigarettes in the pack they would put in some inferior and strong (extremely strong) Turkish, Russian, Yugoslavian or Hungarian cigarettes and throw the pack over the fence. The Russians would throw the knife, fork, or whatever over the fence and the exchange was concluded. The poor Russian catching his pack of Camels or whatever, finding he had been duped would rant and rave in his language. We couldn't understand what he was saying exactly, but we didn't need to understand the language. The obvious result if he could get through the fence left no doubts as to the outcome.

You may wonder why we wanted cooking utensils. The Red Cross parcels we had received contained several tin cans in each and among our group were several tinsmiths or sheet metal workers. They would take the cans and for a number of packs of cigarettes would make you a blower. A blower was a miniature forge about 18" long and 6" wide. It had a small fire box and a crank to turn. You would put in a few small bits of wood in the fire box, light up and turn the crank. The fan in the box would blow air on the fire and it would produce an intense heat. One could boil water in a few minutes. Our favorite dish was a Stalag pudding. We



would take brown bread, sugar, chocolate, and powdered milk, mix them together in an empty powdered milk can, bring it to a boil on the blower and let it set. It sure was delicious at the time. I was going to try and duplicate it a home but never got around to it. I may try it one day. The first results of our pudding and rich food from the Red Cross parcels was a continuous line of men running from the barracks to the latrine. We soon learned to take it easy and as our appetites were satiated the "Skoots" problem resolved itself.

Since many of the POWs didn't smoke, before long a good number of packages of cigarettes were available. We used them as one would use money. You could buy sugar, chocolate, etc. One fellow set up a dice table and held nightly games. Some of the lucky ones had close to a hundred packs of cigarettes at a given time.

At this point in my narrative you may begin to think we were having a pretty good time, however in spite of the better living afforded us by the arrival of the Red Cross parcels, several incidents made life quite exciting to put it mildly. The British had their night bombing raids while the Americans had their day bombing raids. For some reason the Americans didn't drop any bombs close to our compound during the day. Whether the British targets were closer than the American targets or because of the inaccurate night bombing, (I don't know which) we had on several occasions front row center seats to some fiery spectacles. The lead bomber would drop a Christmas tree over the target and the rest of the bombers would drop their bombs on the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree was a brightly lit apparatus which was parachuted to the ground by the lead bomber. We would watch from the windows and several times had to open them to keep the glass from being broken by the concussion from the exploding bombs.

One day we were strafed. Having been a flier I had never been exposed to strafing before and quite naively didn't know what was