

happening. I thought someone was up on the roof fixing it, pounding nails with a hammer, but the ground trooper POWs knew what it was and yelled, "We are being strafed." You should have seen the group hitting the floor. Fortunately no one was hit. Looking back on it I might add it probably would have been an amusing sight for some onlooker to see such a scramble but at the time it wasn't funny to be sure.

One day the fliers and only the fliers were told to line up outside for a special roll call. None of us fliers had been prisoners very long and hadn't acquired knowledge of any of the German language. We didn't know what really was happening. Some of the infantrymen in the barracks had been prisoners for several years and spoke fluent German. They told us later on what we had been through. It seemed Hitler had become incensed over the success of the Allied bombing raids and had ordered every airman POW shot. Here we were standing in blind innocence not knowing how close we were to being executed. Fortunately the Commandant of the compound refused to obey the order. It was near the end of the war and the futility of the order, and the fear of reprisal kept the Germans there from executing us.

I presume the word was soon received by Hitler that no one was going to carry out his order and after standing in formation for an hour or so, we were dismissed to return to the barracks, where we learned from the infantrymen the reason for the special lineup.

Another special lineup was held one day. Someone with access to a radio had learned of President Roosevelt's death. One can only ponder as to the Germans' bewilderment and surprise as we all filed out of the barracks, formed a precise formation and stood there silently paying our last respects to our commander in chief.

Once in awhile we were taken for a shower. It happened so infrequently that I can't remember the intervals, monthly I think. What I do remember is the place. It was a huge room with a concrete floor having numerous drains and shower heads. We were marched into an anteroom 100 at a time where we stripped and then proceeded to the shower room. One had no control over what happened. Once we were all inside, the doors were shut and the water turned on. So you had a shower whether you wanted one or not. Looking around all one could see through the steam was bare behinds and elbows trying to get soaped up and rinsed off before the water quit. I later learned that this was the way many Jews were innocently led to their deaths hoping for a shower they would be met with deadly gas instead of water from the overhead plumbing. To this day I often wonder if the room I took a shower in was ever used for such a purpose.

Days passed into night and night passed into day and we slept and ate and thought and listened. Listened to a soft crump crump. It was very far away and sounded like a very distant thunder boom. Each day it sounded closer and louder. Speculation ran rampant. We had no news so could only surmise what the sounds were. At last we knew. The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming (as in the funny movie by the same name). As the sounds became more frequent, louder, and, closer, the German guards became very nervous. Then it happened. One night the German guards disappeared. It was an eerie and strange feeling we had. By now we could see the flashes from the Russian artillery and tanks. The Russians came in the morning. They hardly slowed down, coming through the fences, picked up their Russian POWs and then con-

tinued on. It was such a quick, methodical and professional maneuver one hardly knew they had come and gone.

Then quietness and happiness, relief and bewilderment, wonderment, and speculation, but no shouts or hurrahs, clapping of hands or any show of emotion. At last, "It's all over" we thought. How wrong we were. One last thought I had as the Russians departed was, "Goddam," I am sure glad they left. I was expecting some surly mad Russian to come looking for the son of a bitch who gave him some foul tasting cigarettes.

The Germans are gone, the Russians are gone, and "tomorrow we will be gone." Tomorrow came, then another tomorrow, and another, but still we remained. Rumors were running rampant: The Americans were coming with trucks to take us out, the Americans were flying in to take us out, we were going to walk out and on and on. Then we were prisoners again, or at least we thought so. The ranking officers took charge, formed platoons, issued orders for guard duty, and KP duty. We were no longer POWs but back in the army again.

It didn't take long for the disgruntled ones to begin to make plans. A week passed and no Americans came to the rescue. We had full run of the camp now. To alleviate our anxiety and boredom we took daily sorties among the other barracks previously not accessible to us, the German barracks, mess hall, officers quarters, the hospital and the executive officers. We were able to acquire numerous souvenirs, among which I found a German rifle in mint condition. One night we were rudely awakened and with panic in his voice by a non com, "There is a patrol of dreaded SS in camp and anyone caught with souvenirs will be shot." A line quickly formed from barracks to latrine, and an undisciplined scurry was made to dispose of the souvenirs in a place the SS would not look into.

A week or so after our liberation by the Russians, and no action from the Americans, a few of us decided to take off on our own and go to Odessa on the Black Sea to try and catch a ride home on a Liberty ship. Plans were formulated and one dark night we slipped through a hole in the fence and silently wended our way through the darkness. The two of us, Frank Powers and I, were among the ones leaving. Carl Groshell elected to remain as he had a bad leg and didn't think he could make the trip. For several packs of cigarettes, Frank and I managed to acquire a map, so we had an idea as to where we were going. It had to be east, heading for the west meant crossing the Russian front and through untaken German terrain and finally crossing through the German front to reach the Americans, a foolhardy and impractical maneuver at best. It was with mixed emotions that Frank and I left the relative safety of the compound, the friends we had made, the warmth and comfort of a familiar place, to embark on a new and exciting adventure eastward.

It was very dark on the night we slipped through the fence. Having not the slightest idea of which way to go, or how to get there we started walking. We didn't have to worry about the Germans as we were now in Russian occupied territory. Daylight finally filtered through the pines along side the road and we saw the stirrings and heard the rustling of people getting up from their makeshift camps of the previous night. Fortunately, for Frank and I, English being an almost universal language, we were always able to find someone to converse with and soon acquired some directions. I remember one place where we stayed. Frank and I were