

Enclosed is a copy of Bob's memoirs. Over the years many people have asked him to write these memories down and Bob was always too busy. About three years ago I finally got him to sit down and begin writing. I have heard many of the details over the fifty years we have been married so the events written down are not the memories of an eighty-five year old veteran but the memories of a much younger man.

He did not go into detail on some of the events but did manage to get the main ideas across.

We hope you can visualize what these men went through during the raid on Dieppe and their incarceration in the prison camps. These experiences must be told to the younger generation so they don't glorify war.

We would appreciate hearing from you after you read these memoirs as to your thoughts and feelings.

Thank you for letting us share this with you.

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## MY WAR YEARS 1940 – 1945

**By Robert C. Large**

I was born on April 2, 1920 in Leamington, ON to Elzer and Lola Large. I was the middle of three boys, Wilson Howard being the eldest and then came me, Robert Cullen and finally my youngest brother Jansen Albert, now deceased. Most of my childhood was spent living in Windsor and Leamington, Ontario.

In 1940 my youngest brother, Jansen, joined the Essex Scottish, a highland regiment out of Windsor. I joined next on July 9, 1940 and my eldest brother Howard followed soon after. I was sent to St. Lukes Barracks in Windsor until we could be sent to Wolsley Barracks in London, Ontario to be outfitted. After about a week in London, I was transferred to Camp Borden near Barrie, Ontario where we started our basic training. I completed my basic training and rose to the rank of Corporal Instructor and was put on permanent army status, later I applied for overseas duty.

We embarked for England in February of 1941 on the Rena del Pacifico. The convoy took over a week to cross the Atlantic. I had one year of regular training and then approximately six weeks before going on the raid to Dieppe, France, we started our Commando training on the Isle of Wight.

On June 30, we boarded the Mother ship, the Prince Charles, and completed individual arming such as ammo, grenades, mortar bombs, bangalore torpedos, bazookas, etc. While we were arming our weapons, one man was killed by an exploding grenade. On July 7, we disembarked and went back to our billets for further training and awaited further orders.

We boarded the "Mother Ship" again on August 16, 1942. We were briefed on the raid and when we heard that it was to be Dieppe, we knew that it would not be a surprise raid as we had been on board the ships for a raid on Dieppe on July 4<sup>th</sup>, but it was aborted and the biggest part of the personnel were sent on leave and told not to talk about the aborted raid. That was an impossibility! We looked to our weapons and ammunition and wrote our "last letters" which were to be mailed in the event we did not return.

The Prince Charles set sail in the night of August 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> for a rendezvous with the rest of the convoy. The night was dark and the water calm. Very early in the morning we entered the ALC's (Assault Landing Craft) and began our run for the beach. All the troops were quiet but relaxed. I was in the front of the craft at the Bren mount to give covering fire. Later in the morning the sky erupted with tracers, mortar bombs and artillery shells, we still had a long way to go to the beach. Suddenly alongside of my head I heard a "zing" as a projectile ricocheted off the armour plating. I shouted "Hey - these sons of bitches are using live ammunition!". This seemed to break the tension in the craft. We were all scared but the adrenaline was running high and everyone was ready.



As we approached the beach we could see the Germans were bunkered in the caves in the cliffs on both right and left side of the town shooting down onto the beach. The beach was comprised of rocks the size of a clenched fist, when a shell would hit the rocks, they would shatter and be propelled like bullets hitting and killing the men. The rocks were like razor blades after being shattered. The beach also contained land mines which killed many of our men. From the waters edge to the seawall it was approximately one hundred feet across the rocky beach. Beyond the seawall it was about six hundred feet across the Promenade (a large flat grassy area) to the town

When the ramp dropped, although I was scared, the adrenaline surge sent me ashore and straight to the wall over a beach of wet slimy pebbles about the size of duck eggs, (this according to our information was supposed to be sand!) enroute to the wall I had to go over two hummocks of stones and two lots of barbed wire.

Being the colonels bodyguard, I immediately set up my Bren gun at the wall and gave battalion H.Q. covering fire to reach the wall.

After H.Q. had taken position, I began firing at many of the windows in the buildings facing the promenade. Some of the windows which showed firing were silenced. In the meantime, Major Ayhurst took up his position to my left and was sniping over the cement fence.

When W/O 2 Connie Stapleton and his squad were ready to go over the wall, I began my covering fire and as Stapleton went by me to throw himself onto the barbed wire (the bangalore torpedos had never arrived to blow it), I heard him shout at Major Ayhurst "hey, you damn fool, get your head down behind the wall". As Stapletons section ran over him, I noticed one of them was my older brother, Howard.

I laid down a withering fire at all of the buildings I saw fire coming from until I saw them enter the town. It was then that Major Ayhurst asked me for my Bren gun so that he could take a target out. He asked me for a pan of tracer ammunition (it was broad daylight at this time). Over the din of the battle, the following conversation took place:

Large: But sir, it is broad daylight and you don't need tracers, use this pan of Regular ammunition.

Ayhurst: I want a pan of tracers!

Large: Yes sir ( and handed him the pan)

Ayhurst: I want you to stay here as my number two man. (I had started to crawl away)

Large: No way, you are going to be too good of a target.

Ayhurst: You get back here, that is an order!

Large: Yes sir (and I crawled back, but stayed below the wall)



After about his third long intermittent burst, a mortar bomb landed on the barrel of the Bren gun. It threw me into the air and when I landed, I had pain in both of my legs, right arm and head. I could feel the blood flowing and knew I had been badly hit. The lower portion of my right leg was shattered. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that Major Ayhurst's head and part of his shoulders had been blown off.

I crawled down into a depression next to the seawall and called for a stretcher bearer, but none came. While I was sitting there, the regiment 2 I/C came to the Colonel a few times and asked the Colonel to allow him (Major Williams) to lead the regiment into the town but the Colonel refused.

By now I was getting weak so I crawled as far as the first-aid post where they dressed some of my wounds.

When the landing craft started to come in to take us off the beach, the M.O. told his men to take the wounded down to the water. Four of the men placed me face down across two rifles and started for the water. Part way there as the bullets were ricocheting around us, I heard one of them say "drop the son of a bitch, he's dead anyway". I was promptly dropped!

I started to crawl to a stranded TLC, but before I finally reached it, I was hit four times by bullets. When I reached the TLC, I took off all of my clothes but my shirt and my Mae West. I tore off my shirt tails and wrapped some of my wounds. I then crawled into the water and started swimming out to the rescue craft, most of the time under water, I think this is why I was not hit any more, and also the salt water stopped the bleeding.

I caught hold of one of the trailing ropes of a craft and was hauled aboard. I was transferred to a hospital boat and was on my way back to England. Unfortunately, about seven miles out from shore a Stuka Dive-Bomber dropped a bomb on us. Another man, an American, Vince Killeen and myself were the only two on deck, as there was no room below decks. We were blown into the water and were the only survivors (to the best of my knowledge). By this time I had fifty-two pieces of shrapnel and four bullets in my body. (This was verified when a German doctor operated on me later).

I now had a leaking Mae West and both legs, right arm and head shot up, and facing a seven mile swim to shore. Between Killeen and myself, we managed to keep the Mae West inflated enough to keep the two of us afloat.

By now the roar of the battle on shore had ended, and by the time we reached shore it was dark. We groped our way up the beach, which we expected to be mined, to a hummock up against the cliff. The hummock had a crater on top so we rolled into it, hoping against hope that a rescue boat might get in under cover of darkness, but none came. I said to Vince, "if we ever get out of this alive, I'll buy you a bottle of whisky".



The next morning (August 20<sup>th</sup>) as we lay hunkered down in the hollow, we could see a German NCO scouring the beach. We hoped that he wouldn't climb up the hummock of slippery stones, but no such luck.

As his head came into view, we could see the startled and scared look on his face. He ducked down. A half minute later, he rose up and shoved a revolver in our face. That muzzle looked about the size of a cannon. We were uneasy and thought he was going to shoot us, instead he said in English, "for you the war is over. Where have you been, we have been waiting four days for you?"

The German herded us along the beach to a fissure in the cliff, this fissure was filled with barbed wire. At this time, it must be remembered that I had nothing on but a shirt with the tails torn off. Vince had a pair of pants and shirt but no shoes or socks.

The German forced us to climb this fissure through the barbed wire with the assistance of a rifle butt in the middle of the back. After we were at the top, I found a crotched stick to use as a crutch, and this eased the pain considerably. With help from Vince, I was able to hobble a considerable distance to a small village. I was made to walk through the village with nothing covering me from the hips down. It was very embarrassing and the humiliation was the worst I have ever had in my life.

We passed through the village to the fields again where there was a very narrow gauge set of rails and a small hand flat-bed car. The German guard motioned to me to climb onto the car and then motioned Vince to push the car.

We arrived at a dressing station. The German medics dressed my wounds and put us on a truck which took us to the military hospital at Verneul. At this hospital I was operated on without anesthetic as they had run out of their supply. By the third time they cut me, I passed out. It was here that I was told of the amount and types of wounds I had sustained.

Most of the Prisoners of War were put on a train to Lamsdorf, Ober Selesia. From Dieppe to Lamsdorf, men were crowded about sixty to a box car with practically no food, little water, no room to sit, poor ventilation and no latrine facilities. Many of the men were suffering from Dysentery.

I was put into the stretcher case car. We were one week reaching our destination. When we arrived at the camp (Stalag VIIIB), we were kept outside of the camp until we were all registered in. We did not receive any medical aid until we were admitted to the camp. I was sent to the critical ward of the Lazurette (hospital) because of my wounds and the amount of blood I had lost.

In the ward, it was discovered that I had gangrene in my right leg. There was no sulpha or penicillin at this time of the war so they were forced to use other means.



Two doctors stood at the foot of my bed debating whether to amputate my leg or try other means of curing me. They decided to flip a coin to see which procedure would be used. Fortunately it came down in favor of Dr. Wilson.

They found maggots in the garbage outside and these were put into my open cast and the wounds checked daily. The maggots eventually devoured all of the dead flesh and my wounds eventually healed. The doctors managed to keep me in the Lazarette for approximately four months, then the German doctor insisted that they would have to send me into the camp itself. After having my own bed in the Lazarette, it was a bit trying at first to get used to being part of a tiered twelve bed assembly.

At Stalag VIIIB, the huts held approximately one hundred twenty men. The bunks were three tiers high and were grouped in fours to make a twelve man unit. The huts held two large stoves for heating. Once a week a Red Cross box containing coal would arrive for each stove, the parcels were a bit smaller than a ten lb. bag of potatoes. This was to heat the hut for twenty-four hrs. The buildings were made of cement blocks and had cement floors so they were quite cold and damp, therefore that amount of coal did not go very far.

The latrine was located away from our huts and contained sixty holes used for bowel movements. When our hands were tied with ropes, we had to help each other in the latrine. We would wipe each other with anything we could find as we could not reach ourselves while tied. It was a very degrading experience. There was one sixty hole latrine for one thousand men.

For urinating, it was done against a tarred wall, then the urine flowed into a groove in the middle of the floor.

The washrooms had running cold water for thirty minutes three times a day. In the shower building, there were three minutes of hot showers available once every six weeks.

The huts were infested with lice. To get rid of the lice, we would go outside and roll in the sand and get loaded with sand fleas, then return to our bunks and cover up. The sand fleas ate the lice and then died off, of course it was an on-going process. German delousing took place every three months. Our clothes were also deloused at the same time as we were but the clothes took longer so we had to wait for the clothes outside in the nude regardless of the weather.

The food given to us by the Germans on a daily basis was certainly not adequate to sustain life. If it was not for the Red Cross parcels which we sometimes received weekly, we most likely would not have made it through the war. An average German food allowance consisted of the following items (weekly):

Substitute coffee	14 gr.	Turnips	45 oz.
Meat	1 1/2 oz.	Potatoes	49 oz.
Salt	5 oz.	Barley	1 1/2 oz.
Bread (black-w/sawdust)	3 lbs.	Fish Cheese	2 1/4 oz.



Syrup or honey(made from coal)	3 oz.	Fats for soup	1 1/2 oz.
Peas	3 oz.	Oleo (made from coal)	3 1/2 oz.
Dried Vegetables	8 oz.	Sausage meat	3 1/3 oz.
Soup	3 2/3 oz.	Mint Tea	16 oz.

When we received the Red Cross parcels the contents varied but we sometimes received butter, canned meat, chocolate, stew, powered milk (Klim), etc. The empty Klim cans were used to make stoves for cooking and other useful items.

At one point, we were hungry since the Red Cross parcels did not reach our camp so some of the men chased a rat through the compound and when caught and cleaned, they made soup out of the rat. It is surprising what a person will eat if hungry enough.

While we were in Stalag VIIIB, we found things to do to occupy our time such as exercising, classes on decorating, school completions and many other subjects, all being taught by our own experienced teachers that were incarcerated with us.

All of the Canadians in the camp had their hands tied with ropes October 8, 1942 to December 2, 1942 and were replaced with chains and handcuffs which remained on until November 22, 1943, a total of thirteen months. This was done in retaliation.

It seems orders that should have been destroyed were not. The Allied orders stated "as all German prisoners to go back to England are to be sent back on assault crafts with the wounded, to keep the prisoners from taking over the ship, their hands shall be tied behind their heads with a slip-noose around their necks". If they tried to break free, they would choke themselves. However, their crafts were sunk (by the Germans) and the prisoners drowned and washed ashore with their hands still tied behind their heads.

After the Germans removed our shackles, they opened the Canadian compound to allow us to visit other compounds, this is how I met a Quarter Master from the Indian Merchant Navy. As the Germans were trying to entice the East Indians to join the German forces, they were given extra rations such as dried bananas, dried figs, cottage cheese and jam, etc. When I would visit Kumina and his aide Zukila, he would feed me a mess tin of cottage cheese, since it is a by-product of milk from a cow, they could not eat it for religious reasons. The dried fruit they had in abundance and it was great until they locked us up again.

I made a very stupid mistake one day. I was standing at the corner of my tier of beds peeling three small potatoes after slipping off my ropes around my wrists. Suddenly someone yelled "Spitfire", which was the alert that a guard was coming, so I slipped my ropes back on. The guard looked at me as he went by, then he came back, looked at me again and started screaming unkind words at me. He pulled me to get me outside as I had unwittingly tied my arms around the upright of the tier. This earned me a few rifle butts to my back and neck, then had to stand at attention for two hours with my nose and toes against the barbed wire.

Another time a German official was coming to inspect the camp so it was cleaned up and all interior gates opened so that we could circulate again. It was winter so my mucker (buddy) and I went for a walk in the compound. We had our shackles draped across our great-coats from



pocket to pocket. We were walking on the main road when the German officials party came out of one of the compounds toward us. As we were required to salute the German officers, we saluted and marched at attention, unfortunately our shackles still were draped across the great-coat. We had slipped our shackles before starting our walk. We spent one week in the jail on bread and water.

We were subjected to propaganda and also continuous threats of life. We were restricted on our exercising and often they held up our mail from home. During searches, the Gestapo turned out our huts and required all prisoners to stand for hours in the cold, scantily dressed.

As our prisoners were digging a tunnel out of the camp, I applied for a place in the escape group but was turned down. I then took things into my own hands. I swapped identity with an Englishman who had been assigned to a farm work party. He stayed in camp and I went to work and hopefully to escape.

We were working in the grain fields reaping and tying sheaves. There was a "Bell" woman working in front and setting the pace, as we neared the woods at the edge of the field, I was behind a knoll and out of sight, so I dove into the woods and crawled until I was out of their line of vision. I traveled parallel to the road and hid in a culvert until dark, then at night I traveled on the road, always ready to take cover. I traveled approximately twenty miles until it was almost dawn.

Unfortunately, although I tried to stay awake, I fell asleep. When I opened my eyes, I was looking at a group of Hitler Youth, who turned me over to the search party and after interrogation and a bit of kicking and punching, also rifle butts, I was sent back to the Stalag where the Englishman and I resumed our own identities.

Settling into camp life again, I was assigned to another mucker who claimed he was in the rackets, buying items with cigarettes and also gambling with cigarettes, so I didn't question the little bit of extra grub he came back with, which he was doing before I was assigned to him (thank heavens), as he was found to be stealing other mens rations. He suddenly disappeared but the panel knew I had nothing to do with the stealing.

We (the Canadians) were now into shackles instead of ropes which were put on us in the morning and taken off at night by the guards using keys. It wasn't long before a way was found, by a prisoner, to unlock the shackles with the key off a Klim can out of the Red Cross parcel. This developed into a way of frustrating the guards. They brought the chains in and out on racks or in boxes. We would line up to get them put on and taken off. When the guard put them on, we would walk over behind him, remove the chains, and hand them back to the prisoner assigned to assist the guard who in turn handed it to the guard to be put on another prisoner. Soon an officer would come to find out why it was taking so long and then everything would run smoothly again. The guard was then in trouble for letting this happen. In desperation, the guards brought in the boxes and told us to put them on or off ourselves.



After the Germans lifted the shackling, the privates and Jr. NCO's were sent on work parties, this gave us a chance to get into the rackets. It was possible to buy radio parts, bread, clothing, watches, etc. with cigarettes sent to Canadians by the families and friends back home through the tobacco companies. We used them for either bartering or for money when playing cards. The radio pieces were then put together by Signal Corps prisoners and hidden in Red Cross boxes. This way we could get English broadcasts which kept us informed as to what was happening on the Allied front.

Through the Red Cross, we were able to get musical equipment such as horns, drums, stringed instruments and harmonicas, also playing cards and some sports equipment. Through this and also the purchasing of some bed sheets, mens and womens clothing were made so we were able to put on stage shows. We put on musicals, western skits, minstrel shows, comedies, etc. I personally sang in most of the shows, and did a chorus line routine with "girls" and I was the tap dancing lead. I had learned the basic tap dancing steps while I was in school as a student. In the camp, I was taught a bit more from a fellow prisoner.

When the German officers saw the show, they suggested we put on entertainment for the work parties. I was sent to Krakow to work, but was appointed to entertainment, for a two hundred man work party. By laying on entertainment it raised the prisoners spirits and also gave them more will to do sabotage on their jobs. I had no chance to escape and the party was sent back to the Stalag.

Occasionally on our way back from town while purchasing items for the entertainment, our guard would stop in a pub for a beer and take us in with him. If we had our own money, we were allowed to purchase a beer also. I happened to have a chocolate bar in my pocket one time and so gave it to the son of the pubs owner. The owner was so pleased that he gave the prisoners some of the better beer while the guard was given the watered down beer.

In the Stalag we had a fall-in to be counted every morning or whenever the Germans wanted, in all kinds of weather. The guards would count us by fives, then stop and write it down, etc. till the count was completed. During the count, we would shift one or two men into different positions so his count would be wrong and he would have to recount. This was done occasionally to frustrate the Germans. This maneuver was also used to cover up the escapes from the Stalag. On one of the many counts, I was grinning when he stopped and found out he was wrong. He immediately hit me on the side of the head with his rifle. This type of punishment was used quite frequently.

The next work party that I was able to get on was at Katawicz near Krakow. It turned out to be a refinery for making benzene. This was against the Geneva Convention which stated that Prisoners of War could not be made to work on anything that was used for war (more or less). When we refused to work, they brought in the machine guns to shoot us all. We went to work.

Our job there was to construct storage tanks by riveting. We had one man in the tank with a riveter and one man catching the red hot rivets, inserting them and then holding them to be riveted. We were under supervision from the outside only. The riveter inside the tank would hammer the rivet at an angle so it would not clinch properly. When the tank was completed, we



were sent back to the Stalag. Later when the tank was filled with benzene, it began to leak and finally opened up like a tulip. As it had been against the Geneva Convention for us to be working on the tanks, we were not punished.

Some of us were then sent to Neustadt (one of many towns by that name) to work on maintaining the railroad line. Our job was to pound stones under the ties to level them and also to make sure the spikes were in tight. When the guard was not looking, we would use a series of ties and pile stones on top of one another until they were holding the ties up, then fill in stones and tamp them a little, whereupon we would call the guard to examine them and then move on to another series. When we completed our stretch of tracks, we were sent back to the work camp. We never knew if our bit of sabotage made any trains derail.

That night I went through the wire again. I did not get too far as they put the dogs on me. As soon as I heard the dogs, I climbed into a tree but did not achieve invisibility. The search party jammed my rearend with bayonets to speed me down the tree. However, they did not report me as it would put them in the hot seat. After dismantling the camp, we went back to the Stalag. After arriving back at the Stalag, I decided to make up an escape kit. This consisted of hardtack biscuits (for sustenance), pepper and powdered mustard, (to throw on my tracks. The dogs would sniff it up and then they were unable to track for a few days). All of these items were from the Red Cross parcels. Some extra socks and some bandages, purchased with cigarettes were packed also. Chocolates and raisins which were also purchased with cigarettes were included. I then swapped identity again and went out on another work party. I was sent to Gross Kusow, a large community of produce, dairy, swine and sheep farms.

I worked in the fields for a week or so and got the lay of the land and when the opening came up for a milker, I was given the job. The crew was made up of five P.O.W.'s and a Milk Meister. Our job was to clean stalls and bed down the cows twice a day, feed and milk twice a day and some cows milked three times a day and this was long before the automated milking machines, it was all done by hand. There were approximately two hundred milking cows for the five of us to take care of in one day. We also assisted at calvings. We were awakened at 4:00 a.m. and worked through until 9:00 p.m.

We were billeted in an implement shed which was converted to a bunk room including a stove and table, all enclosed behind barbed wire. The guard room was at one end outside of the barbed wire and the cook house was at the other side of the compound, also outside of the barbed wire. One man was assigned for cooking all meals and the heating of the water for bathing in the winter time.

There were some interesting situations that occurred while I was there. One of the men assigned to the horse barn and implement shed scrounged an old rubber tube. Another man supplied a "Y" from the orchard and thus the sling shot was made. The first thing to disappear was the flock of pigeons. They made good eating! The next to go was the chicken flock. When the



officers investigated, fortunately for us, they found three dead chickens with Thrip (a deadly disease for chickens) so they must have thought that that is what killed the rest.

During the winter, I was on the front end of the bath trough which we were carrying from the cookhouse to the bunkhouse. Half way there, I slipped on some ice and both feet went out from under me. This pulled me down backwards so that my spine came down across the cross-member and paralyzed both of my arms. I was sent to Emanuelzagen Hospital outside of Katawicz. I spent two weeks in the hospital with extensive therapy, then was sent back to Gross Kusow.

The night I got back to the camp, I made an attempt at an escape by going through the wire on top of the bunkhouse. The guards were having a few drinks and were playing cards and singing so they did not hear what little noise I made. However, it did not give me much time as they would be getting our crew up for work at about five a.m. I moved as fast as possible for five hours as I knew the area from previous residency. I took my escape kit with me so about an hour before I had to find cover, I began sprinkling mustard and pepper on my trail. I found a farm with a haystack, so I climbed on top and tunneled down in far enough that a bayonet or pitch fork could not reach me. I then packed the tunnel behind me. I could hear the German guards prodding the haystack, but the dogs were silent. I crawled out after dark and plugged the tunnel, then I took out across country and went to ground in a haymow of a barn.

These same tactics went on for three days. On the fourth day I was sneaking around a barn and as I rounded my second corner, hugging the wall so I would not be silhouetted, I walked right into a German guard who had stepped outside for a smoke. But at least I had tried again to escape!

The next work party I was on was for entertainment work. This was another two hundred man party. I was also put in charge of the group that carried the food from the cookhouse to the compound. This was a good job as I could have a guard take me into Krakow when I needed anything for entertainment purposes.

While there, I became friendly with the head cook who was being pampered and admired by the officer in charge of the camp. I would pay the cook for writing materials with the chocolate bar I received in my Red Cross parcel. He in turn would give it to another cook, a woman he was dating, who then would give it to me as she apparently liked me. I would then buy something else from the head cook with the same chocolate bar. It never dawned on him as to what was happening while I was on that work party.

In the meantime, I was buying clothing from the Polish civilians as well as work permits and travel permits. After that work party folded up, I went back to the Stalag. I wore my Polish clothing under my uniform.

Two weeks later I applied for another work party, however, this one turned out to be farm work but was assigned to the work crew loading sugar beets into rail cars at the switch line at the train depot. Unbeknown to be me, some of the crew were sabotaging these open cars by putting cinders and small stones in the hot-boxes. This was done by pitching beets over the cars with



pitchforks. The guard would then go around the other side of the car to watch the P.O.W.'s, while he was on that side of the car, the men on the other side would throw the stones and cinders into the hot-boxes. This was done alternately, keeping the guard running back and forth.

Near the end of the day, just before leaving, I went to the rest room of the station, I put my uniform on under my Polish clothes and grabbed a beet fork and climbed into the car to level it off. The engine was waiting and while the other men kept the guard busy, I ducked down inside of the car. The train left the station and I was on my way again but before we reached the switching yard, the hot boxes started to smoke and squeal. I jumped off and joined a group of Polish workers with farm implements. I traveled with them until we reached the station, then went to another platform where a passenger train was about to pull out. I showed my papers and climbed on board. That was a working mans train.

When we reached Leipzig, I went to the latrine. It had locking stalls so I stayed there until the train for Regensburg left so that I wouldn't be riding with the same people. It would also be a working mans night train giving me a chance to get some sleep, also I would not have to talk to any passengers. This would be my third night on the road.

After many side trackings to let troop and supply trains through, we arrived at Regensburg. I had to catch the train for Ulm here but had a four hour wait and quite a crowd boarded the train so I had to share seats as this was not a working mans train. I opened a Polish newspaper and pretended to be reading.

At the next short stop, an older woman boarded with a young boy and took the seat facing me. After about one half hour, the boy asked me in German what the time was. I kept the Polish paper up in front of me and ignored them. As he could see I had a big Polish watch on my arm, he persisted. He then asked me in perfect English what was the time and without thinking, I automatically looked at my watch but did not say a word. I knew I had made a big blunder and knew they would notify the authorities. They left the train at the next station. Prior to this, I had decided that I would get off at Singen instead of Ulm.

Singen was the nearest depot to the Swiss border and I had been told by some of the Polish and Dutch laborers that a guide could be hired to take me across the border and to the first Swiss Patrol Center.

When we arrived at Singen, I got off the train and right into the arms of the Gestapo. I was taken to their post at Ulm. The Gestapo interrogated me and used the rubber hoses, gun butts and tightening head band. However, I stuck to being a Canadian P.O.W. and not a saboteur or spy. They were not too happy with me, so they shipped me to Bergen Belsen, a concentration camp for mostly civilians and was put through six days of Hell!!!

Then one day they told us our hut (which was comprised of mostly Jewish men) were going to the showers and we had to take all of our clothing off and hang it on pegs on the wall for delousing. While I was standing in line waiting my turn, a guard called me over and said "Large



– you are not Jewish”. He then had me get dressed and go to the office. They had realized I had not been circumcised as all Jewish boys are. I often thank my Mother for not having me circumcised! When they finally got my record straightened out, they sent me back to the work party at Katowicz. Two days after getting back to the work party at Katowicz, I was sent back to the work party at Gross Kusow.

After working in a milk barn again, until the first of February, we were told to pack up all of our gear, then they started us walking as the Russians were driving toward us. This was the start of the infamous Death March. We eventually joined up with other groups of P.O.W.'s.

The Germans marched us back and forth between the Allied Eastern Russian line and the Western Allied Lines. This went on from the first of February, 1945 to the first part of May, 1945. On the march we learned to live off the land, as the Red Cross and the Order of St. John could not get the food and clothing parcels through to us, unless we came upon a depot.

On the Death March, we took any step required to stay alive, like going into houses along the way and getting any possible food item or anything we could use for a campfire at night. When the guards put us into grain fields for the night, they set up the machine guns on the corners diagonally opposite one another so that we were completely covered. We ate the green grain plants and charcoal from the fires to keep us from getting dysentery.

We were strafed by Allied planes at times because we were a marching group interspersed with marching German troops. From the air it would have been impossible to distinguish one from the other.

Toward the end of the march, my right leg became infected from the shrapnel and swelled until I could barely walk, even with the aid of a forked stick and the help of other Kreigies (P.O.W.'s). Fortunately the Milk Meister whom I knew from working with him at the Dairy farm, came along with a tractor and a trailer loaded with his family and belongings. As he recognized me, he let me aboard the trailer. This was a godsend to me as I would have had to fall out of the ranks. The guards were given orders to shoot anyone that fell out of line. He dropped me off at a Dutch working party attached to a hospital and they admitted me to the hospital. I had an appendicitis attack a week later and was operated on by German doctors.

The following day the hospital received orders to pack up and move the hospital train. I was forced to work carrying heavy packing crates the day after my surgery but had no ill effects except severe pain.

I asked them to release me but they refused as they wanted me for a bargaining chip. They put me into a box car of bedding along with other wounded German soldiers and some nurses. One of the nurses, Marget Cerney an Austrian, took care of me at the hospital.

On one of our trips through the Pullmans of wounded German soldiers, I saw that every one of them had a Canadian Red Cross parcel.



(3) The bombing of the enemy positions which had been promised by Lord Mountbatten never materialized.

(4) The truth about the type of beach and the condition were not passed on to the troops.

After five days of traveling and side tracking, we arrived at Lubeck and were side tracked. While on the sidetrack, an allied tank pulled up alongside of the train we were on but I could not get to the door to let them know I was there. Being a hospital train they let it go through.

The following day we reach Neustadt. A tank again pulled up alongside of the train and I was able to get to the door and yell "for Christs sake, put a round through that son of a bitching engine!" "O.K. Yank" with a British accent and they then fired at the engine.

I climbed out of the box car and went over to the tank. They were surprised that I was a Canadian. They gave me a revolver and ammunition for my own protection, also fed me some of their rations, "all because I looked like I needed it". "I WAS A FREE MAN!!!"

That night one of the nurses had developed abdominal pains and the nearest hospital was Lubeck. I commandeered a hearse and put one of their Red Cross signs on it. We drove to Lubeck to the hospital, dropped her off and we returned to Neustadt. That was the last time I saw Marget Cerny and thanked her for her care of me.

My liberators sent me back to Lubeck to the evacuation camp and I was flown out to England two days later. On our arrival in England, we were greeted with a Welcoming tent with all kinds of sweet pastries, etc. the other P.O.W.'s and I declined to have any but the N.C.O. in charge said it would upset the women if we did not eat some, so we did. After not having any decent food for so long we were afraid the rich food would upset our system. We were sent to the hospital for delousing and then they found out how sick we all were due to the rich food we had just eaten. All of our stomachs had to be pumped out.

On our trip to the hospital, the lorrie driver insisted that I ride up front with him. When I climbed into the cab, he was grinning at me, the driver was my younger brother Jansen. He had not gone over to Dieppe with my brother Howard and me. It was quite an emotional reunion.

My brother Howard also survived the years in the prison camps and we all ended up reuniting in England and had one hell of a celebration!!!!

In my estimation, the raid was never meant to succeed. For example:

- (1) Men were sent on leave and told not to talk, after a raid on the same town had been aborted one and a half months earlier.
- (2) The raid on August 19, 1942 was not aborted when the element of surprise was lost after the Commandoes ran into the E-Boats.



- Enclosed is a copy of Bob's memoirs. Over the years many people have asked him to write these memories down and Bob was always too busy. About three years ago I have been married so the events written down are not the memories of an eighty-five year old veteran but the memories of a much younger man.
- (3) The bombing of the enemy positions which had been promised by Lord Mountbatten never materialized.
  - (4) The truth about the type of beach and the condition were not passed on to the troops, and the tanks were left with their training tracks on instead of the battle tracks. The stones forced the tracks off of the bogies and they bogged down on the beach. The few that managed to get over the wall and on the promenade had the training tracks blown off.
  - (5) The heavy bombardment of the town by the heavy guns of the navy did not take place. A destroyer did come in and try to take the guns out that were dug into the sides of the cliffs.
  - (6) The Russians were calling for a second front and if a large scale raid failed, it would show that a second front was not feasible at this time, nor the proper equipment available.

My wounds eventually healed. I was held a Prisoner of War for thirty-three months, except for my five escape attempts. I weighed one hundred ninety-five lbs. and was solid muscle when I was captured, when I was liberated, I weighed eighty-six lbs.

Throughout the thirty-three months of captivity I had many times been scared. While hiding in the haymow and having bayonets thrust at me, while in the tree with dogs jumping for me, while in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, even daily you never knew when you would be brutally beaten for even minor infractions. We tried to make our daily lives bearable by trying to keep busy and also using humour as a safeguard. It was thirty-three months of living hell!!

Vince Kileen survived the war and I did buy him his bottle of whiskey.