

This page has been archived and is no longer updated.

[Find out more about page archiving.](#)

15 October
2014

BBC
Homepage
BBC History

WW2 People's
War
Homepage

Archive List

Timeline

About This
Site

Contact Us

WW2 People's War

An archive of World War Two memories - written by the public, gathered by the BBC

A Rhodesian Pilot's Story - Chapter 4 - The Long March by Allan Hurrell

You are browsing in:

[Archive List](#) > [Royal Air Force](#)

[Archive List](#) > [Prisoners of War](#)

[Archive List](#) > [World](#) > [Germany](#)

Contributed by **Allan Hurrell**

People in story: **Allan Hurrell**

Location of story: **Stalag VIIIB Larnsdorf ober Silesia, Stalag IXA Seigenheim**

Background to story: **Royal Air Force**

Article ID: **A4037087**

Contributed on: **09 May 2005**

In Chapter 1, I related how I was shot down near Stavanger, Norway in May 1942, and spent several months recuperating in hospital in Norway. Chapter 2 describes life in POW camp at Stalag VIIIB Larnsdorf Ober Silesia. In Chapter 3, I told of an escape attempt. This final chapter tells of the Long March, which is a well documented forced march, lasting 50 days and covering 175 miles.

Evacuation from the Stalags

It became increasingly apparent during the final months of 1944 that the Russian front was moving ever closer; often we would see flights of Luftwaffe Air bomber Jn87's (Stukas) flying eastwards over the camp. By estimating their speed and the time taken to return, a rough estimate could be made of our distance from the front. In November it seemed to be approximately 200 miles and by mid-December not more than 70 to 100 miles.

The winter of 1944/45 was extremely cold, the ground frozen and covered with snow. By mid-January, heavy gunfire and bombs could distinctly be heard. The general expectation among the prisoners was that soon we would be liberated by the Russian army, a prospect I must say not relished by many POWs, as the Russian soldier was an unknown quantity when it came to identifying POWs against German combatants. However we were not destined to find out.

On the 22nd January 1945, on the orders of Adolf Hitler, all POW camps situated in eastern regions of Germany and occupied territories were ordered to evacuate their Stalags and march westwards away from the advancing Russian army. I packed the few belongings which I had collected from various parcels from Rhodesia House and from my fiancée Doreen in the UK, and placed them into a kit pack. I had several text books on biology and veterinary medicine also from Doreen, as I had decided whilst in

Archive List



This story has been placed in the following categories.

Royal Air Force
Category



Prisoners of War
Category



Germany Category



★ Recommended story
What's this?

📷 Story with photo

prison to become a veterinary surgeon on returning to civilian life. Other items such as towels and spare clothing were packed into the kit bag, plus two blankets — amazingly the kit bag was almost full.

Start of the Long March

We marched out of the camp at 17h45 on the 22nd of January. There were about 1000 RAF personnel and an unknown number (to me) of army soldiers. German guards were stationed at intervals on each side of the marching column. The pace at the start was brisk and difficult with the icy roads. My kit bag became increasingly heavy and cumbersome.

That first night we marched for almost 10 hours, stopping at a village called Friedenwald. We were lucky that first night to bed down in a barn. My friend Phil Bridgeman and I decided that no way would it be possible to carry our kit bags, so we put on as much clothing as possible, pyjamas, vests, shirts, 2 jerseys, battle dress jacket, long johns, trousers and several pairs of socks. It was essential to have as many pairs of socks as possible, as they soon became wet from walking in deep snow and water. Each evening socks were changed and wet ones were tucked into one's belt to dry during the next day's march. The following day, after we had set out, I abandoned my kit bag, just retaining my blankets, draped over my shoulders, or tied with string in the shape of a sausage and carried by hand.

We had no idea of our destination, neither in fact did the German officer in charge. Each morning he had to phone Berlin for instructions for that day's destination. This happened I think almost every morning.

After eleven days and 175 miles or 250 km, we arrived at the town of Gorlitz and moved into Stalag VIII A on the 3rd February. At this time, the camp was occupied by Yugoslav prisoners. We spent a week in VIII A, during which time we had a hot shower (once only) and our kit deloused. This was routine, though I was unaware of having any lice on board.

We tried to converse with some of the Yugoslavs which was difficult as they spoke no English but some were able to make their way in German. I remember one Yugoslav soldier offering me a portion of his stew, which I politely declined, to much laughter of his companions. I didn't realise that I had insulted him by refusing, as such a thing was taboo in their culture.

The March takes its Toll

On the 10th February, we resumed the march. The week's rest had helped to recharge our batteries to some extent, although even then we were all losing weight. The daily marches started on average at 9am. At times we bedded down in barns where the straw was most welcome; other times in open courtyards. The cold at nights in such places plus the lack of adequate food made dawn welcome.

As the march progressed, many POWs became ill and were unable to continue. They were eventually picked up by the cart following

the back of the marching column, and taken to the nearest hospital. Many suffered from dysentery. I remember trying to dissuade fellow prisoners from drinking the water running down the drains at the side of the road, for I was aware that these agricultural fields were often sprayed with untreated sewage. How many POWs died on the march in our column I did not know. Basil Glasse, a Rhodesian friend with whom I had shared the same barrack throughout our time in Stalag 344, died on the long march. A talented man, with a Science degree from Rhodes University, whilst in the Stalag he studied languages and became fluent in German, Spanish, French, Italian and finally Russian, truly a great gift and such a waste to fall by the wayside.

On at least eleven occasions we received no rations, on two occasions nothing for two days. The main topic of conversation on the march, particularly amongst Canadians for some reason, was food. With all the details, just thinking about food made the gastric juices flow. Phil, whose father was a chocolate manufacturer in Calgary, would go into great detail on the various and many types of chocolate; eventually I would have to tell him to shut up.

I have a list of our daily marches and the rations received each day (see appendix). I am indebted for these figures copied from a list made by two South African army friends on our march, Kaywood Meeker and John van Abo, who had been captured in North Africa ex 6th Armour Division and had reached our Stalag 344 Landsdorf via Italy.

It had taken us fifty days walking from Landsdorf to Seigenheim, a distance of five hundred and eighteen miles, most of the time on country roads. The German authorities avoided taking us through any large towns or cities. I remember passing through one village where a fairly large crowd lined the road as we passed along. Verbal insults were thrown at the RAF, mainly because of the bombing by the RAF and US Air Force. Most of the insults were made by women who considered that we the RAF were not being treated harshly enough and were apparently encouraging the guards to be more brutal, etc. One German soldier, possibly an air force serviceman, who was a repatriated POW from England, obviously because of war wounds, addressed the women, saying that the British treated their prisoners very much better than the Germans, and he was ashamed to see how the British POWs were being treated. Such a small thing certainly gave us encouragement albeit for a short while.

For two days, 16/17 February, we received no rations. We were rested in a barn in which we found several sacks of corn. By slowly chewing the grains, they slowly became quite sweet and palatable and helped to fill a gap, relieving slightly the gnawing hunger.

The End of the March, the Start of Freedom

On the 16th March we arrived at Stalag IXA Seigenheim. As mentioned before, this was a French POW camp from which they were employed to work in Germany. Many of them were Africans

from the then French colonies in Central and North Africa. Soon after we arrived in this Stalag, it became obvious that the German guards were preparing to move on, as Allied armies were advancing into Germany from the west. The Germans told us that we could now either remain in the Stalag or move away with them. They also tried to recruit amongst the British POWs men to join the so-called Legion of St George to fight the Russian communists. No one, as far as I know, volunteered. The German guards and all other personnel pulled out of the camp, and some POWs went with them. Suddenly we were free — the German guards had all left, all gates were open. The French army POWs, mostly from French African territories who were out on working parties, returned to camp. They soon organised themselves to form foraging teams, looting surrounding farms of their livestock, mainly chickens and pigs, plus vegetables. In the town was a store containing food parcels from the families of the French POWs which the Germans had kept locked up for some time. These were now distributed amongst us. It was from the food in these parcels that many of us contracted food poisoning. For five days I suffered acute diarrhoea, spending most of the time in the “loo”, returning to my billet to find someone had stolen my warm blanket which I had carried for over 500 miles. On one occasion a flight of American fighter planes flew over the camp. Suddenly one plane peeled off and strafed the camp, wounding several POWs. Fortunately he was stopped doing any further damage by his flight leader.

On the 30th March, Good Friday, General Patton's tanks arrived, cheered with much jubilation by us all. They threw out “K” ration packs for us before they pressed on with their advance. We had to wait anxiously for another 14 days before finally preparations for our departure were completed. All RAF POWs were taken to a nearby landing strip to await a squadron of Dakota's D.C 3's, which were transporting thousands of jerry cans of petrol. As soon as each plane landed, we were divided into sections to unload our allotted aircraft. No need to say that they were unloaded in double quick time and we were soon squatting on the floor, taking the place of the cans.

The date of our departure from Germany was April the 13th 1945 (also a Friday), and the day President Franklin Roosevelt died. It was just one month short of 3 years from the time I had been shot down (17th May 1942).

We landed at Wolverhampton and were received by a welcoming party — tea cakes, etc. plus WAAFs and RAF ground crew. Most of us could not face the rich food. We were soon on our way by train to a rehabilitation centre at Cosford, Staffs. All Canadians, including Phil Bridgeman, went to a special Canadian centre at Brighton, I think.

After a few days, those of us who had been passed by the Medical Officer and considered reasonably fit to travel, were issued with new uniforms and clothing, given double ration cards, rail warrants and money.

I set off to find Doreen. Her last letter, received some months before we set out on the long march, gave her address as "Kingsdale", Bramham Road, Bingley in Yorkshire. I eventually found the house to discover it was empty. Fortunately a neighbour was able to tell me that the Hepworth family had moved to Weston-Super-Mare in Somerset, so I was back on the train that evening. I spent the night in a YMCA hostel in Crew and the next day went on to Weston-Super-Mare, not being too sure where the family were. As it was now getting late, I found a B&B for the night at the cost of 5 shillings. I set out to find the Hepworth and Grandage office. Amazingly whilst I was walking up the street scanning the buildings on the opposite side, a voice behind me said, "Ee Lad, it's good to see you". It was Joshua Hepworth, Doreen's dad, who had spotted me from his office. Well Doreen was there and with much joy from all of us, and some tears I may add, we all went to their home in Severn Avenue. And so ended the war saga, and another chapter was about to begin.

*-----**-----*

Appendix A - Route: The Long March

22nd January 1945 to 12th March 1945 from Stalag 344 Lamsdorf via Stalag VIII A Gorlitz to Stalag IXA Seighenhain

Arrive Depart

Lamsdorf 344 17.45 22/1/45
 Friedenwald 03.50 23/1 09.00 23/1
 Kniegnitz 21.30 23/1 14.00 24/1
 Gobsen 19.15 24/1 09.30 25/1
 Bourange 15.30 25/1 09.15 26/1
 Dawsdorf 18.00 26/1 09.50 27/1
 Alt Janer 15.30 27/1 09.00 28/1
 Goldberg 18.15 27/1 09.00 28/1
 Lowenberg 15.15 31/1 09.00 1/2
 Giessmansdorf 16.00 1/2 08.45 2/2
 Heidersdorf 16.15 2/2 08.45 3/2
 Stalag VIII A Gorlitz 11.50 3/2

Had shower and delousing. This camp had many Yugoslav POWs.

Length of march: 280 km (175 miles)

Duration of march: 11 days, approximately 25km/day

Departed Gorlitz after 7 days

Arrive Depart

Gorlitz 12.30 10/2/45
 Reichenbach 17.30 10/2 10.30 11/2
 Weissenberg 13.15 11/2 10.30 12/2
 Bautzen 14.15 12/2 11.20 13/2
 Kamenz 22.15 13/2 09.30 14/2
 Konigsblucke 15.30 14/2 10.40 15/2
 Kalkreuth 17.15 15/2 10.50 16/2
 Meissen 14.30 16/2 10.30 17/2
 Lommatzsch 15.30 17/2
 1 day rest 08.30 19/2
 Dobeln 15.15 19/2 09.15 20/2

Leisnig 15.00 20/2 09.30 21/2
Bad Lausick 15.15 21/2 09.30 22/2
Borna 14.00 22/2 08.45 23/2
Wurchnitz 17.15 23/2 09.45 24/2
Zeitz 12.30 24/2 09.30 25/2
Serb/Eisenborg 20.00 25/2
German Army Camp, 1 day rest 10.15 27/2
Jena 16.15 27/2 09.30 28/2
Hohlstedt 12.45 25/2 10.30 1/3
Mieligen 15.30 1/3 13.30 2/3
Buss Uben 20.15 2/3 13.30 3/3
Liebsliben (Gotta) 20.00 3/3
1 day rest 07.45 5/3
Mechterstadt 12.30 5/3 08.00 6/3
Appendix A (continued)

Arrive

Depart

Stedtfeld 13.10 6/3 08.45 7/3
Obersuhl 14.30 7/3
1 day stop 09.30 9/3
Honebach 12.45 9/3 07.45 10/3
Hermanshof 20.30 10/3 07.30 11/3
Frielingen 14.30 11/3 07.10 12/3
Stalag IXA Siegenhain 12/3

Arrived Stalag IXA Siegenhain, near Kassel, on 12th March 1945.

Distance VIII A Gorlitz to IXA: 550 km

Lamsdorf to Gorlitz: 280 km

Total: 830 km (518 miles)

Duration 50 days on the march

6 days rest en route, 7 days at VIII A Gorlitz

Speed Average when on the road: approximately 22.9 kilometres per day

© Copyright of content contributed to this Archive rests with the author. Find out [how you can use this](#).

[Back to top](#)

Most of the content on this site is created by our users, who are members of the public. The views expressed are theirs and unless specifically stated are not those of the BBC. The BBC is not responsible for the content of any external sites referenced. In the event that you consider anything on this page to be in breach of the site's [House Rules](#), please [click here](#). For any other comments, please [Contact Us](#).

[About the BBC](#) | [Help](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy & Cookies Policy](#)