

And bloody Tin Head. He was a bad-tempered gorilla-like bastard. No one ever said anything cheeky to him. He was best left alone. It was said he'd suffered a very severe head wound on the Eastern Front and had had to have a plate put in to protect whatever he had in the way of a brain. A thoroughly bad beggar, anyway. There was another blond corporal as well. I never knew his name or nickname, but Uncle Dan was by far the gentlest of all.

Each hut had a stove for cooking and warmth. As well there were the 'blowers'. This was a thing with a gadget to turn and blow air into the bits of wood or coal chips – when you could get them – to boil food and brews of Red Cross tea or coffee. All made by hand from Red Cross food tins and scraps of cloth to provide a belt to drive the gadget which blew the air. However, the coal ration wasn't enough – not nearly.

Some-one, who might have been the New Zealand pilot McMillan, succeeded in picking the lock of the coal shed door. He and three others, including Doover Martin, used to break in and fill kit bags with the precious fuel and hand it out to volunteer carriers, of which I was one. It didn't seem right to gain the benefit, which was tremendous, without lending a hand. But the chaps inside were the ones running the real risk. It was a peculiar feeling humping a kit bag of coal boldly down the main road, which ran east and west and divided the camp in halves, past the guard box as bold as brass, making believe you were on an official work duty.

As a result the stove was kept almost red hot and allowed the inexpressible luxury of roast potatoes and hot bully beef or spam from our food parcels. However, all good things come to an end. One night the chaps got inside and there was that other blond corporal waiting. He shot Taffy Evans, a Welsh air gunner with the DFM and he died almost instantly. The others did fifteen days in the camp lock-up, and this was only November. We were cold enough now as it was, with the winter snows falling but the real cold, the dreadful cold of winter in Central Germany, hadn't even started.

So, what are we going to do now? Fortunately, our Canadians had more cigarettes, such as Chesterfields, Camels and Lucky Strikes, than they knew what to do with – and it was with this graciously given

assistance that we enjoyed a reasonable amount of cooking through the bitter 1943/44 winter. The guards were never averse to accepting bribes, thank goodness. And it was round about now that Norm McKee and Earl Scott re-joined us. Their gallant escape attempt in the latrine pit at PG 57 had been a complete success. The dumb Jerries hadn't given a thought to looking there. They had got over into Yugoslavia and had even met a British brigadier and his men on some sort of secret service job there. However, they had wandered off again to walk to freedom and had struck up an acquaintance with a Yugoslav girl. The girl and one of them had retired into some bushes leaving the other to keep watch but he must have been thinking about what might have been going on in the bushes and not keeping proper guard. Some Jerries pounced unexpectedly, so here they were back in the bag with us. But a two to two and a half months' breath of freedom must have been great.

And there was also around now another great sensation as it turned out to be. A New Zealand soldier arrived in the camp.¹⁴ This man and three or four of his mates had been working on a farm when the Italians surrendered. These brave fellows had stolen rifles and some ammunition and had wandered the countryside at night looking for Germans bedded down. When they found them they opened fire and went for their lives. I never found out how many enemy they had polished off but they were, as they really had to be, eventually caught. Ward's mates were shot out of hand and he had been brought to Germany for a red tape court martial at Dresden before meeting the same fate.

Well, one morning he was taken over to the showers to be deloused before being taken to Dresden and he disappeared. How it was managed I have not the faintest idea but the bloody Jerries never found him, and to my certain knowledge he never left the camp. I believe he was sometimes here, sometimes there, sometimes with the Russians or with the French or other nationals. But he was never found. I know because I was there. Who the men were who organised this miracle¹⁵ I do not know and never wanted to know. You never ask about things not your concern.

Occasionally a theatre group put on a show in a hut converted for use as a theatre. The only chap from our hut who took part was maybe Educated Evans, but of that I am not now certain. I know none of our