

whole division. One morning we awoke to find the Polish women had gone as quickly as they had appeared, taken to God alone knew where.

Accommodation trouble now – we had to have an American share bunks with us. Jock and I decided to sleep together in his while the Yank took over mine. Which worked OK if you can call it that. Some others thought it a good idea to saw off half the dividing plank and so let three enjoy reasonable space. But that idea didn't work. The half of plank left could not take the weight.

January, February – Pretty bloody cold, hungry as hell now – few cigarettes, still playing bridge (with some success, thank goodness, for a few more cigarettes). The news getting better all the time. So good we start on our hut for fuel.

A crowd of Danes had arrived in the camp, and all blessed with a most plentiful supply of food from home. Alex Richardson had landed a job in the camp post office sorting the mail. He had struck up a friendship with one of the Danes, who pulled up his shirt in our hut one day to show us his back. It had been well scarred with the whip. Nice bastards, these bloody Huns! He gave Alex and Jim quite a lot of tinned food which they shared with us – our little group of ten Australians. Very, very kind of them. To amuse myself I drew up a menu of the day's food for when I arrived home. I look at it occasionally these days – and hell! It would be as much as you'd eat in three whole days – crumpets, bacon and eggs, roast beef, beer, wine, the lot.

Geoff Taylor and a friend had hit on the idea of getting out and stealing a Junkers 88 from an airfield some miles to the north of us. I believe he had managed the aircraft's cockpit layout from a French worker who went out there daily. How to get out? The simplest idea in the world. They found a length of wood which only two could carry, marched casually up to the eastern gate as if on a duty and the dumb guard let them out. They had to be covered in the count. We were paraded in fours and two very short air gunners, one a Scotchman, were in the middle at the start of the count. As soon as Blondie had passed them they hastened down to the other end and took up position in the two vacant places. Geoff and his friend's attempt came to nought so they decided to come back. They picked up their piece of timber and walked casually back through the east gate again. A very stout effort.

An episode with Hauptmann Koenig took place one cold day. Frankie Beste and I, shivering with cold, were headed for the latrines when the Hauptmann and his stooge appeared. A shout. We stopped. He came up to us and said: "Vot do you mit der hands in the pocket? Are you a soldier?" I looked the bugger straight in the eye and said: "No, I'm an airman."

We stared at each other for a second or two, then went our separate ways. Dumb Jerries! He was too thick to realise I'd been insolent.

March. Still cold. The front still closing in. Both east and west now fighting the Huns on their home soil. Serve them right. They started it and are now getting their well deserved gut-full.

Now American fighters start to appear at quite low altitude. Previously we'd really only seen them so high up on their bomber escort duties, the twin-engine fighter, the Lockheed P38 Lightning and the North American P51 Mustang.

I must here mention the bloody Hungarians or Bulgarian guards who did duty for a brief period instead of the Jerries. I never found out why. They were in a bluish uniform with old-fashioned Shako head gear. And talk about bad-tempered bastards. They were worse than the Huns. We were very pleased they left so soon and the Jerries returned.

One day when we were doing the circuit once again, an ME109 tore across us pursued by two or three Mustangs. Christ! The silly bastards open up on us! Being strafed, the first time for me at any rate, is bloody, bloody frightening. Everybody in the compound hit the deck in as precise a way as any British guardsman on parade.

Another day the bloody fools caught a wood fatigue party outside the camp. Result? Ten POWs killed and one Hun guard for luck. Another effort – we are inside the hut this time – talk about hit the dirt fast from the top bunks.