

## **DIEEPE STALAG V111B/344 - DEATH MARCH TOUR HIGHLIGHTS**

### **1000 km - 100 days - 500 men**

Sept. 1, 1942: Arrive in Annahof (now Sowin) and march to Stalag V111B (a few kilometers and were registered in compound 7 to 10. Stayed here until Jan. 22, 1943.

October 8, 1942 to Sept., 1943: Dieppe prisoners to be tied, then later chained to retaliate for German prisoners being found with their hand and feet tied, then shot in the back, in the Channel Islands.

Nov. 11, 1942: Dieppe prisoners moved to Dieppe compound 19 to 22.

Jan. 22, 1943 to March 7, 1944: Volunteer for Arbeits Kommando (Working Party) E608. They were housed in a logar (labor camp). Party consisted of 50 men at Hirschfelde (now Kaniow) Forest. Main job falling timber and trimming branches in winter months.

March 7 to May 12, 1944: Recalled to Stalag V111B.

May 12, 1944: After travelling all night in box cars, arrive in Peiskretcham (now Pyskowice) part of new Arbeits Kommando E578, then later E749, but same job, same place on a larger crew (100 Canadians & 100 Brits).

Jan. 20, 1945: Russians getting closer, mass evacuation. Main north-east highway sees columns of German troops and transports moving to the front to face Russians. Allied bombings cause prisoners to continually dash for shelters.

Jan. 22, 1945: Death march starts and arrives in Laband (now Labedy). Could hear guns all the way. Russians getting closer. Highroad in panic with civilians and German army in white clad uniforms driving white troop carriers. Along the way prisoners saw broken carts, dead horses, discarded equipment, a Jew in his striped uniform and a dead Russian. During the first few days many German front line troops seen in the towns passed through, waiting for action. Vern estimates they seen millions of English and Russian POW's.

Jan. 23, 1945: Short stop at Rauden (now Rudno). Left at midnight in bitter cold and marched til 6 a.m. Had to pause because of large column of Russians ahead. Leather shoes were frozen stiff, many frostbitten feet that had to be amputated later in the march. Continued march til they crossed Oder River. Column of Russians pass thru, poorly shaved and unwashed faces, begging for smokes and food. Also many dead Russians along the roadside, many shot. Wasn't clear whether more dead Russians or Jews. These dead were horrible sights, bloody and goary, most shot, some beaten to death with rifle butts. Jews had their throats slit. Geneva convention saved Canadians this fate.

Jan. 24, 1945: Marched to Alt Weiler (now Blazejowice) in wet socks and frozen boots, passing dead horses and men.

Jan. 25 to 27, 1945: Marched thru Zinntal (now Sulkow), Grobitz (now Grobniki) and Traumitz.

Jan. 28, 1945: Rest day at Jagensdorf (now Krnov) where they saw piles of ammunition and shells.

Jan. 29, 1945: Because of horrible winter conditions, pulling a sleigh with 8 men becomes impossible so they discard sleigh and begin packing their belongings. Very hard task!

Jan. 29, 1945: March to Spilensdorf (now Bruntal)

Jan. 30 to Feb. 2, 1945: March to Klinohl, Bergstadt (now Horni Mesto), Trubnitz (now Troubelice) where they stop for 1 day rest

Feb. 3, 1945: March to Gras Poidt (now Moravska Trebova) and stop for rest.

Feb. 5-6, 1945: March to Abtsdorf (now Opatov) and arrive Feb. 7, 1945. where they rest for 5 days.

Feb. 13, 1945: March into Czechoslovakia to Leitomischl (now Litomysl) on dreary day and bad roads. Here Russian POW's drank 40 litres of machine oil in the barn where they slept. Many dead the following morning and many more the following day on the road. Here you would also see all prisoners darting thru open doors and windows to fight over bread and cakes. Hunger was endemic. Because of this Germans decided marches would now go around large towns instead of through them.

Feb. 15, 16, 1945: Marched to Chotzen (now Chocen) and Holitz (now Holice) where they rested for a day.

Feb. 17 to 28, 1945: March went through Viscka (now Byst), Opatowitz (now Opatovice nad labem), Klemitz (now Stracov Klenice), Unter Gutswasser (now Dobra Voda u Hulic), Aulibitz (now ulibice), Wobrub (now Obruby) and Uber Sleinow (now Koracova Vrutice). At the last place they were billeted in a sheep barn and slept 4 or 5 to a pen.

March 1 to 18, 1945: Marched Saleslitz (now Melnik), Slosuin (now Spomysl), Stern (now Hvezda), Nesuchen (now Nesuchyne), Furwitz (now Horovicky), Deutch Klima (now Kojsovice), Neudorf (now Nova Ves), Royau (now Rajov), Plan (now Plana), Wilkowitz (now Vlkovice).

March 19, 1945: March to Haid (now Bor) No bread to march on, only German coffee, a few row spuds and turnips for breakfast. At mid-morning march stopped and prisoners grouped into commandos according to race. Our guys were commando #10 of 100 Canadians. Vern and JOC became brakemen on the Company Wagon. JOC was the provider for the unit and this day scored a loaf of bread. All along the route he scored plenty for the group. Hunger drove the group to steal a lot of grub from the Russian rations.

March 20 to 23, 1945: Marched Pfraumberg (now Primda), Lohma and Albersreith, a suburb of Weiden, where they stayed for 15 days. Hunger drove them to pilfer many spuds and that's all they ate for days, then 8 eggs and a hen, then 8 more hens. Some of the guys worked for local farmers in return for food. while here.

April 15, 1945: Marched to Treluslau (now Vohenstraub), where they hatched a plan to escape. Included Vern, JOC, Jim Horne, George Morris, Bruno MacDonald and Raymond Geoffrion. They decided to go through a door by a wagon in an adjoin shed which was on the main street. This shed connected their barn by a loft. At dusk, they got their packs down to the door. At 9 pm it was dark so they got down in the shed by the wagon. The Germans must have got wind of the planned escape so they tripled the guard and one was posted very close to the group. So close, they could hear him breathe. It got very dark and they had to be extremely quiet. The tension was unbearable and it got very cold. Many troops were passing on the street. They decided to use the troop's noise to cover theirs when the time came. A guard shone his light down their alleyway once and the group were sure the Germans were aware of their plan and waiting for them. At midnight they decided to go during a change of guard. Vern slid the door out and JOC, Jeff and then Vern went through. All of a sudden a light shone on them and a guard shouted out "Ah Da ist eine, Da ist zweite. Sheiston Posten, Sheiston". The light went out. Shot after shot echoed through the shed as the guard emptied his rifle, and the Hun Sergeant, his revolver. JOC and Jeff were now back in the shed, while Vern clung to the front of the wagon for protection and cover. They shouted a plea of surrender, but the Germans kept firing and didn't challenge. The Sgt. shouted, "Quick" on the street and more Germans were there in a flash, firing through the barn door. Vern expected to die any moment. The door swung open, they turned a light on him and Vern seen the Sgt loading his gun, while yelling "There's another....shoot him". Vern threw his hands up and ran, out past the wagon and back to the barn. JOC and Jim Horne were already there. They quickly got their boots off and into bed as Mac and Jeff came back. All were back but Georgie Morris. They then snuck out of the barn and heard the Germans still looking for them. They heard more shots and still George never came back. Vern was shaking like a leaf. When things quieted down, JOC went out to see if he could get news about George. The guard said he had been heavily wounded and taken to hospital. Vern was amazed next morning to see that the wall where he was standing was riddled with bullet holes.

They later found out that George had been shot 5 times, at close range and was dead. They learned later, from Ted Welton, who was watching through a crack in the barn, that after the first shooting, the Hun had come back, found George hiding in the straw, shot him, then carried his body and placed it under the wagon to make it look like an escape. They named the Hun Sgt. the "Killer" and swore they would seek revenge if the opportunity ever presented itself. This same Hun often boasted of killing 28 Russians and would ask if anyone else was planning to escape. He always wore his greatcoat and would ride up and down the column during the day. The group swore his days were numbered.

April 16 to 18, 1945: Marched Tannesberg, Oberviechtach and Pillmersried.

April 19, 1945: Yank planes in area strafing and set fire to a petrol column. One pilot waved and another did a victory roll. Marched to Roding. Very hot day.

April 20 to 26, 1945: Marched Pilgramsberg, crossed Danube at Straubing. Here they saw many dead Jews in the ditches and many more of them in their thin, striped uniforms, sunken eyed and barefooted. Then on to Leibfling,

April 27, 1945: Crossed the Isar River and saw many SS in all towns on this side of river. Stopped at woods and billeted close to Niederveihback.

April 28, 1945: Saw many Hungarian troops, a lot of troop movements, French POW's and Jews, going in the opposite direction. Rested and slept cold and miserable, on the roadside. Finally marched to billets at a farm a few kms from Landshut.

April 29/30, 1945: Yanks very close and their artillery falling on all sides of prisoners. Marched all night to a place just outside Vilsbiburg.

May 1, 1945: Marched in snowstorm to Buchbach, near Velden and close to Munich. Americans arrive in tanks and columns. Huns put up no resistance and surrender. The group told a Yank about "Killer" and the Yank gave one of the guys his gun and told them to do what they had to do. Killer was dispatched and buried later in frozen ground using a 3 tine fork to do the digging using a lamp light.