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*Stalag IV-B (4-B)*

**"One Cold Night and a Rosary"**

"This is the last time I'll ask you to help me clean the attic," my wife said. "Everything we come upon, you say, 'Don't throw this away, or don't throw that away.' Please tell me what we were even up here for."

But I scarcely heard her words as I looked at the old, broken, brown, wooden, beaded rosary in her hand. For thirteen years, I had thought I had lost it. I had almost forgotten it and the incident that brought it into my possession. Yet, there it was, and with it the memory of the one cold night and a rosary.

It was while I was a Prisoner of War in Germany that it happened. A group of twenty-five Americans were picked out to leave the camp which was called **Stalag 4-B**. We were to go north to the small town of Sandersdorf to work in the coal mines. I was one of the twenty-five to leave, and the only Catholic in the group.

Upon arriving at our destination, we were quartered in a small building with a double row of high wire fence around it, between which one guard patrolled at night only. There were three guards and one Commandant in charge of our group at night and on Sunday's. During the day, while at the mine, we had a different group of guards. At night our guards would take four hour shifts. Four hours on, eight hours off.

As you know, or have heard, the Nazi's had no love for the Catholics. Our Commandant, who must have been indoctrinated by Hitler himself, had a very special dislike for them. Upon discovering I was a Catholic, he always managed to find extra things for me to do, and would laugh and joke and fold his hands, as if in prayer, whenever ridiculing me. I tried to retaliate by making the sign of the cross whenever he looked at me. I stopped this, though, when I found out he thought I was doing it because I was afraid of him.

One Sunday, when the Commandant was supposed to have been gone, one of the guards, whose name was Herr Engle, called me into his room. Upon entering, I noticed a woman sitting at a small table. She smiled as the guard shut the door, motioning me to be quiet and, at the same time, she handed me a small sugar bowl full of strawberry sauce. Thinking the world had come to an end, I hurriedly ate them. I don't think anything tasted as good to me as they did right then.

Then, to my astonishment, she pulled out a rosary and pointed to herself and the guard and said, "Catholic." I looked at the guard and he nodded and was all smiles. Just then, the door opened and there stood the Commandant. Everyone froze. He walked over to the woman and snatched the rosary out of her hand and started spilling out German a mile a minute. From the look on the woman's face, I thought she was going to faint right there. Before either of them could say a word, I stepped over to the Commandant and grabbed the rosary from his hand, and told him it was mine. I also told him the guard had no right to take it from me, and that he should tell the guard that he should leave my stuff alone. He turned and asked the guard in German if he had taken it from me. The guard immediately answered, "Yes." They exchanged a few more words, and then the Commandant ordered me back to the main room.

I found out that night that I was to be punished. Not for having the rosary, but for being out of the main room when I shouldn't have been. For my punishment, I was to patrol inside the fence, along with the guard, with nothing on but my shorts, and the burlap strips on my feet.

It was the last part of March and very cold. I didn't think I would be able to take it. When the time did come, I stripped and started for the door with one of the guards when the Commandant called to me. I stopped and he bent over and took the rosary from my pocket and tossed it to me and said, "If you pray hard enough, it may keep you warm." I walked, stamped my feet, slapped myself all over, and even cried. AND I DID SAY THE ROSARY, OVER, OVER, AND OVER.

When the guards four hours were up, the next guard that came to relieve him was Herr Engle. The minute he saw the light go out in the other guard's room, he stripped off his overcoat and handed it to me. He turned around and let out a low whistle, and Frau Engle came from behind a building and up to the fence with a big kettle of hot soup. Herr Engle passed it over to me. Whether any of it was meant for him, I don't know, but I ate it all myself. They both whispered to me in German, and from as much of it as I could understand, they were thanking me for what I did that morning. I went to give her back her rosary, and she shook her head and folded the rosary into the palm of my hand. She then made the sign of the cross and disappeared into the darkness. After Herr Engle's stint was up, I had one more to go. But, surprisingly enough, it didn't seem too cold.

There was a rosary said on those beads every day thereafter. It was just thirty days after this incident that we were liberated by the 69th Division. I was on the boat home that the rosary broke. I put it away in my duffel bag, and didn't find it again until thirteen years later. I had it repaired, and am now using it again. Each time I use it, I wonder about Herr Engle and his wife, and how they are, for, Sandersdorf is in the Communist zone.

*Robert M. Fecht*

*Supplied by his Grandson, Mike Fecht*

We have a picture of him and Judy Garland speaking to each other on the phone from a magazine back then and we're still trying to find exactly where it came from, although I do know the story. Apparently they had some sort of contest where a celebrity would call a soldier. Someone nominated him, so he knew nothing about it when he won and she called. Upon introducing herself, my grandfather, in complete disbelief said, "If this is Judy Garland, sing Somewhere Over the Rainbow." She proceeded to comply with his request right over the phone and knocked his socks off.