

Joseph W. Zimmerman
81st Engineers (Combat)
Stalag 9-B

THE GREAT CIGARETTE FIASCO

All of us probably tried smoking in our younger years. I myself never liked the taste of tobacco and didn't smoke. But, while we were in the prison camp we did receive the Red Cross parcel in March, 1945. If some of you remember in 1939 Lucky Strike Green went to war. The Lucky Strike package was colored dark green with the Lucky Strike logo in a red circle. The green dye was used by the Army to dye the uniforms and fatigues that we wore, thus Lucky Strike Green went to war.

But, when we opened our Red Cross parcel we saw that there were two packs of cigarettes in the parcel. One was Camel cigarettes and the other was Lucky Strike, which were still in the green package. They had been packaged in 1939 and this was 1945 a period of six years that those cigarettes had been sitting in the Red Cross parcel. At one point in our incarceration cigarettes were selling for as much as \$20.00 each, or you gave up your poor ration of food, which wasn't much but it did sustain your life somewhat. Some of the people who were addicted to cigarettes gave up their food and shortened their lives and died from malnutrition. I vowed then that I would never smoke and be addicted to cigarettes for the rest of my life.

AN EXTRA BOWL OF THIN SOUP

One day in March, 1945, the camp commander wanted 110 GIs to serve on a work detail in the nearby town. 110 of us marched into the town not knowing what we were going to do, but we were promised more food if we went. When we got there, we were put to work filling in the bomb craters and repairing the railroad that had been bombed out a day or so before. The extra food wasn't much and wasn't worth the work we did — one extra bowl of very thin soup. We were out altogether about 30 hours. We filled in craters, laid down railroad ties and put down the tracks. On the way back one of the GI's told the guard he had to relieve himself and stepped off and captured a chicken. He hid the chicken under his coat and brought it back to the camp where they tore up one of the bunks and cooked the chicken in the small heating stove in the barracks.

At a prisoner of war meeting in 1995 we were at a luncheon and the fellow next to me (a former prisoner) said he was having weird dreams and wasn't sure whether they were true or not. He asked me about the chicken incident. I told him that it had happened when they fellow on the other side of him said he had had one of the legs of the chicken and it had really happened.

THE GREAT ATTEMPTED LATRINE ESCAPE

Several days before being liberated a camp commander ordered all prisoners to march out and march towards Central Germany to be used as a bargaining agent for their surrender. All of the other nationalities — English, French, Russian, Polish, and French Moroccans marched out. We Americans refused to move. We were all non-coms with one medical officer, a Captain. He told the camp

commander we were not going to move. The camp commander wanted at least one in every hundred to move out. We refused. The next day we were all ordered into a field outside the camp while the camp commander and the medical officer argued about what to do. The medical officer came through all the guys in the field and told one in every five to say he was sick, take dirt in his mouth and then vomit. Four guys would carry him into the barracks, until almost everyone was out of the field. If you are sick, according to the Geneva Rules, they will not move you. The next day an SS Officer came in and demanded that we all leave.

He and the camp commander and the medical officer discussed the situation all day and we still didn't move. The next morning we were all ordered out into the field and the word was that if we didn't leave by the end of the day the SS Officer would shoot everyone. It was a rather hairy, scary time. Guys were going down in the manholes to hide and cutting holes in the barrack floor and hiding underneath, because we knew we were close to liberation.

Four guys felt that they could go down into the latrine and there was a tunnel where the farmers used to take the dung from the latrine, and fertilize their fields with it. These four guys felt they could get out, past all the fences, through this tunnel and escape. But, when they dropped down into the latrine, they were in two to three feet of dung and it was like a vacuum and they couldn't move. It was a latrine with ten to twelve holes and they were stuck there.

We had to tear up the wood in the latrine and take the boards and wedge them down next to their legs so they could get themselves out of the dung. It took us several hours to free them from the bottom of the latrine. We finally got them out and the camp commander finally got through to someone in top command and they told the SS Officer to leave us alone and get the hell out of there. The camp commander did not want the deaths of all the GI's in the camp on his record when liberation came.