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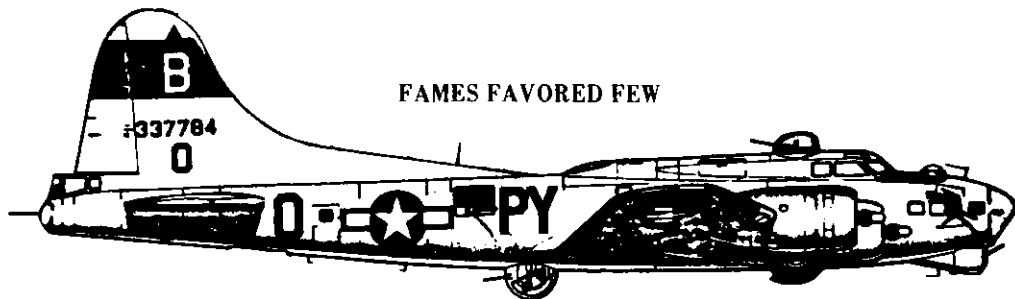
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THE JACKALS GO BANANAS

by William B. Post

PART VI

The Cabbage Patch Guard

The call sign 7MP of Podington had long been stilled, cut off abruptly without the customary AR, end of transmission. I began to wonder if Podington had ever existed. I was now in the land of purgatory, where friend and foe alike were trying to stay alive. The B-17's were hunting marshalling yards, while their friends and protectors, the P-51's, were stalking moving trains.

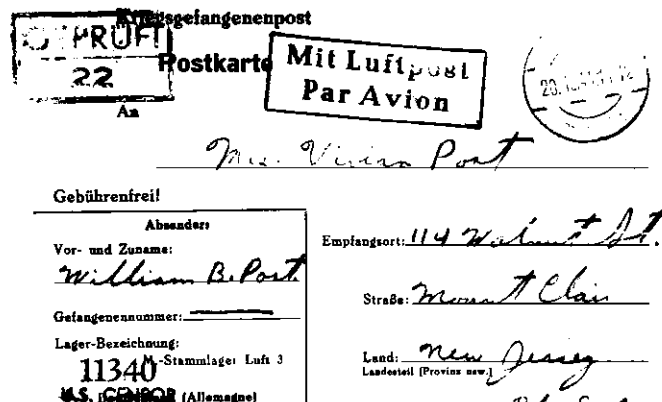
I lay on a stretcher at the Leipzig station. The engine was huffing and puffing like it wanted to get going. They carried me aboard. The car was like a day coach without seats. It had windows and there was a door at each end. They placed me on straw on the floor. Other wounded were already laying there. I didn't know them nor whence they came.

One guard had a fish face and fish eyes. He glared at us like we were vermin. His ancestors probably came from the weasel family. The other one was quite different. He was big with a ruddy face that was always smiling. He kept clapping his hands together from the cold. He looked like a farmer. He came over to me and offered me a cigarette. It was a generous gesture because guards only got two cigarettes a day. I turned him down. Smoking on straw wasn't a good idea. He seemed dumb enough to talk to. (You had to be careful talking to smart ones. If you said something wrong, you would pay. With them it was a battle of wits.) He told me that before the war, he was a farmer and had raised cabbages. He added that, we are going to Meiningen. "Meiningen! Oh that's great," I said. I wondered where Meiningen was. "We have red crosses painted on the roof. The middle car is filled with ammunition," he continued. "Isn't that illegal?", I asked. "Krieg ist Krieg," he said gruffly. War is war, as though, this made it legal. He nearly lost his balance as the train pulled out with a jerk. He stalked to the end of the car and never talked to me again, ticked off at my illegal crack. It's the way it had to be. You couldn't let the enemy guard a rock. You had to make them angry. It wasn't much but it was something.

The rail system was a shambles. The stations were graveyards of broken engines. Track beds had large holes that were constantly being filled. Marshalling yards were surrounded by bombed out buildings and were being retracked. Only hospital trains traveled by day. The thousand year Reich was being held together by gum and string.

Sitting In A Bullseye

At dusk, we slowly pulled into the Frankfurt yards; our engine



A postcard from Germany. We were allowed four a month.

sounding as tired and cold as I. We saw eight airmen hanging from street poles. We could tell by their clothes they were airmen, but we couldn't identify the country they were from. The jackals, a name I gave civilians, were on the prowl again. We slowly came to a halt in the middle of many tracks. The engine bounced us around and took the rest of the train away. Our car stood all alone as darkness fell. A herd of jackals surrounded the car. They were screaming and shouting at the top of their lungs. The guards showed their guns at the windows and screamed back at them to go away. They started beating on the car and shaking it back and forth. The guards screamed at them, their shaky voices revealing they were as scared as us. If they started throwing things through the windows, we would be bad trouble.

The air raid siren went off and the pack vanished. The overheads sounded and our guards got out, locked the car, and left. We were in the middle of a prime target, caught like rabbits in a leg trap. You could feel the fear in the cool air as we peered at each other for comfort. We were vague shapes, only the whites of our eyes glistened from the moonlight. I struggled to the window. An R.A.F. pathfinder came over and dropped three circles of flares. They landed in the yard. There was a red, blue and white one. They were kind of pretty. He would radio back to drop on the white one or north of the blue one or whatever. I lay back down on the straw, waiting. Nothing happened. I got back up. The flares died out. It was only a diversion to draw the German night fighters away. The all clear sounded and our guards came back.

The Mad Major Draws His Luger

We pulled out in the morning and made an uneventful trip to Meiningen. The hospital was a few blocks from the station. A couple of P.W.'s carried me there on a stretcher. It was surrounded by a high wire fence and had only a couple of guards patrolling around it. Inside was a walk that ended at a bridge over a small brook. When I got inside, there were beds with metal frames over them to tie casts on. It was the only place, I was to see, that looked like a hospital. It was a house full of great gaping wounds, severed limbs, and boys who had gone over the edge. It was run by mostly British Commonwealth soldiers. English, Scots, Canadians, Australians, and South Africans performed the mundane chores. The patients were mostly the same with some Americans and French.

It was here I received my first pay. Non-Coms received seven and a half marks a month. You couldn't buy anything with it, so we used it for poker chips. When someone would win it all, he would hand it back and we would start again. We left baskets of this money there, thinking it was worthless. When we got back our government was paying ten cents a mark. C'est La Guerre!

It was also here, that the two muscles that had formed on the back of my ankle holding my foot in a down position, relaxed and disappeared, allowing me to walk more like a human being again.

They gave me a British battle jacket and a black fur hat. All decked out, I had on a black fur hat, a British battle jacket and shirt, brown flying pants and black shoes with one lace. I looked like Rollo the clown.

One day I was looking out the window when a P-51 dropped out of the sky guns blazing at the rail station. There were four of them. "51's 51's," I shouted. Everyone staggered and wobbled to the windows. "Tally-ho, go get em lads, good hunting, cream

them." The cries went up in different accents. Some on crutches, some holding on to a buddy, some with no legs still in their beds shouting, "Get me to the window damn-it." An army of has beens had gotten their battle blood up.

They were beautiful. The first one came down with guns blazing and swooped up. The second followed with his guns firing and then he swooped up. The third thundered down and swooped up followed by the fourth. In the meantime, the first had circled over and roared down at a right angle, his guns firing, as the fourth cleared the target. They flew a cloverleaf. Our cheers were dampened when the third plane was hit. It was smoking and its engine was coughing. It disappeared from view. A 20MM nest on the hillside had gotten him.

A German major came running in. His face was red as he shouted at us. He was waving his luger around. He ordered us back to bed. The P-51's came back firing at the 20MM nest. The major opened a window and was firing at them with his luger. It was like throwing snowballs at the moon. He was madder than a wet hen. The P-51's flew away. The major glared at us, put his luger away, and stalked out. When he got outside, we all cheered. We expected him back but he had had enough.

There were many dead and wounded at the station. Some of the healthy P.W.'s volunteered to carry them back to the hospital. When they got there, a bunch of civilians threw belts around their necks and tried to strangle them. With the help of the guards, they managed to get away and beat a hasty retreat back to the hospital. Krieg ist Krieg. War is War.

The next day we talked to a guard. He told us the P-51 fell upside down in the river and the pilot died. He also said his buddies had killed the 20MM gunner. Somehow it didn't help. I was soon to witness the battle of the one legged giants, but that's another story.

AT THE END OF THE STRING

by William B. Post

PART VII

As I slept, on my bed in the darkened ward, my dreams were of my lovely wife, Vicki, our little apartment and a large steak. They could be wiped out by an invasion of the night horrors: the screams and cries of the wounded, a B-17 blowing up, an ME-109 coming at me guns blazing, a big man hitting me on the jaw as I lay wounded on the ground, the briefing room at Podington as they took the cover off the map revealing a long string going deep into Germany. "Oh no!", I would groan. I would awake with a start in a cold sweat. The horrors stayed with me long after the war. Some men couldn't live with these specters of the night and drifted into a happy world of their own, never to return.

I found myself sitting on the end of the string deep inside Germany at Meiningen. When I was flying missions, I used to tune in Axis Sally. She had a sexy voice and played good music. Of course, you had to put up with the propaganda: Americans, you are coming to your deaths. We know where you are and we are waiting for you. I would yell into my oxygen mask, "You're always waiting for us. Get on with the music." I didn't expect propaganda in a P.W. camp. The Germans had two newspapers for us: one for the English and one for the Americans. The American one would have items like; (Why do you Americans have to shed your blood to save the English again in a war they started?). The English one would read; (While you brave soldiers are risking your lives, the Americans are having a good time with your wives and sweethearts.) We would exchange papers and laugh. I guess it was practice for the propoganda ministry. They struck out.

The Battle Of The One Legged Giants

One day a large verbal argument ensued. It was between a

Canadian and an English soldier. They both had recently lost a leg. They had not yet learned to use crutches. They were holding on to the metal frames of their beds with one hand and swinging with the other. They would miss and grab one, to keep from falling. They couldn't hurt each other but, they could hurt themselves if they fell. I started to laugh at their anger and frustration. I was becoming callous. There was no room for romantics in "La-La-Land". Two P.W.'s broke them up and placed them in their beds still shouting at each other. They were short in stature but, giants in the fact, that the trauma of losing a leg had not dimmed their fighting spirits. They'd make it okay.

Training The Clunkers

I was looking out the window. A German drill sergeant was trying to teach boys, dressed as soldiers, how to street fight. They had bands on their helmets with twigs and leaves stuck in them. They were on the run. Two boys bumped into each other. One boy dropped his rifle. One tripped and fell down a flight of stairs. The drill sergeant was going bonkers yelling at the couple of them had gotten into a shed and knocked a hole in the roof. They stuck a machine gun through the hole. The owner of the shed was yelling for them to get out and waving a pitchfork around. One boy took his helmet off and stood up scratching his head. The segeant, who was screaming at the man with the pitchfork, turned his wrath on the boy with the itchy head. The boy dropped to the ground and put his helmet on. The sergeant gave up and moved his troops on, with the man with the pitchfork still yelling and pointing to the hole. The sergeant gave him an international gesture. It could have been any army!

Thems Good Maggots

One day, the doctor and an aide cut the cast off the arm of an