

Diary of Walter Meyer

Translated by Andreas Suchi

Part 3

May 1945

One day in the camp Sodus Point (N.Y.)

In the morning 5 o'clock, the alarm clock rattles, or better a whistle shrills and a voice bellows "get up"! It's time again, the night is over, the day begins. I still have time and remain lying down for another half hour until the bell calls for breakfast. Now I quickly go to the washroom and then to the breakfast in the dining room. At the cutlery tray I provide myself with the necessary tools. The compartment for large spoons is open, so there is soup. From the adjacent table one takes bread as much as one wants, goes to the serving window of the kitchen and then to the table. Each table is set for 10 men. After breakfast we return to the barracks and make our beds. When the lieutenant goes through the room, everything has to be in order, otherwise there are "Germanic fighting games". Under the bed the shoes have to be clean and aligned, on the other side under the bed is the duffel bag. I lie with 5 men in a corner. Alternately we sweep and scrub. In the meantime the whistle of the company commander sounds again. The first work commandos step out, it is meanwhile 6:20 a.m. I still have time until 7:20 a.m. I clean my boots and do other things until my work detail has to step out as well. In file we are received at the gate by a guard who accompanies my command today. At a leisurely pace (P.W.- steps) we walk to the road where the factory truck is waiting. Now the daily morning drive begins. It is wonderful outside now, it is green and blooming. Through small and clean towns (villages in our case) on beautiful asphalt roads the ride goes at 40-miles per hour pace (1km - 0.621 mile). In the middle of the small towns there are some bigger houses with nice big stores, impeccably decorated. The houses outside the "store street" are surrounded with nice manicured lawns and planted with trees, shrubs and flowers. It looks nice and friendly, a fence around the house (by the way, all are wooden houses) is not known here. In front of each house there is a car on the road or in front of or next to the house. (According to statistics, there is one car for every five Americans). We drive to Webster, to Jaybee Packing Corporation. We arrive around 8 a.m. and the work starts. We are assigned to work by the foreman. At 10 a.m. there is a 10 min break and at 12 noon a one hour break and then at 3 p.m. another 10 min. At 5 p.m. it's closing time and we go back to the camp. The (... censored ...) When we get home at around quarter to 6 p.m., we go straight to dinner, which usually starts at 5:30 p.m. Then it's quiet until 6:30 p.m. At 6:30 p.m. is the daily count, for which we have to line up in the yard. Work orders for the next day are read out, other things are announced and the mail, which unfortunately comes very

sparsely, is distributed. Now we have the evening to ourselves. My next walk is now to the washroom, shower and shave, then put on the Sunday shirt, and the remaining hours until the taps at 10:30 p.m. fly by. There is no real quiet time, of course, because when there are 30 men in a barrack, there is always something going on. After the daily work everybody is tired and I can say, that I sleep well.

How might a day look like for you, my dear ones? Do you still have your apartment, your food and drink and rest from the occupying army? How and where will we meet again? Hopefully, you will remain healthy in spite of everything.

20. May 1945 Pentecost

It will be a wonderful day today. Not one cloud in the sky and the sun is shining. Something to (... censored ...) ...wander into the countryside. The desire to be with you my loved ones is growing. On a beautiful Pentecost day in May was our engagement day. Many years have passed since then and today we are so far apart and how long will it last? According to newspaper reports, the first prisoners will leave for home during summer. When will that day come for me? I always come to the same thoughts again. How will I see Germany again, how will I find Neuruppin¹, and how will I see you? I don't hear anything from you. How are you, where are you? Are you healthy? Can you live quietly now, or has everything been taken from you? How often have I spoken already years ago about the fact that things will change, once again. On the preceding pages I have recorded the menu of a week. While we had a nice piece of meat every day before, it is now almost over. However, also with the current meals we are ok. Do you still have this food? If I only would get news from you soon. Hans will probably already be with you this year, we, from a labor camp are still needed. But all this should not embitter me when I know that I will find you again in good health and only this thought and your words from 31.12.1944 "... we will meet again..." keep me going and I want to live to stand by you again.

Last week I spent a few days working in a large cold store. It is interesting how things are done there. Frozen meat in cardboard boxes, rock hard, being loaded into rail cars and fruit still in abundance. Pitted cherries, just sugared, as well as strawberries in jars, all rock hard, taste great when thawed. It's hard work, but we've gotten used to it. Now I want to send you a greeting card and hope that you are all healthy and cheerful together and can also spend a beautiful Pentecost day.

Pentecost is now already over. It was a nice quiet day. Did you also have your rest? Hopefully I can be with you again next year.

¹ Neuruppin is the city (north of Berlin) where the family lives

27. May 1945:

It is a beautiful Sunday, which we really fritter away again. I have just finished my nap (2:45 pm) and now I like to do some work. We are already quite far with our American English lessons, speaking, nevertheless, is still quite difficult. "Red Riding-hood" / "Rotkäppchen", the fairy tale is written now. It's fun, after all, but you also have to work hard to learn something. During the week when one comes tiredly from the work in the evening, it is sometimes quite difficult. But you can't always sleep, and you certainly can't read all the time. Old magazines published in America from 1928 - 1944, "The house wive", with novels by Courths-Mahler and others are the order of the day here. Yesterday the canteen, however, had again some nice, good German books for sale, which were soon sold out. - So another Sunday passes. I have just finished a greeting card for you, my dears, and now I wish that it reaches you soon. Longingly I wait also for a sign of life from you. Almost four months have passed between your greeting card of 4. Feb. 1945 until today. Much has happened in this time and I only wish that you have survived everything well and are healthy. Will we see each other again this year? The first transports are scheduled to leave at the end of the summer.

3. June 1945

Another week is over. It is already the beginning of June and still, apart from a few nice days, it is quite cold. There is still heating, and I can't get rid of my cold at all. I guess I'm especially sensitive this spring. My nose is constantly stuffed up and my ears are numb. Well, when it warms up, it will be fine. - We now have our own farm for our camp. A big field is cultivated with potatoes and cabbage. Also in the camp every spot is used and cultivated with onions, carrots, cucumbers, peas etc. In between we also have beautiful lawns and beds with flowers. It's all growing great and the camp actually looks pretty nice. But if I could leave it today and go to you, that would be even nicer, but who knows when that day will come. The camp life is sometimes too much for me and I would be glad if it would end soon. - I still don't have any mail and I can't get rid of the worry "what is going on with you, are you healthy"? The thoughts wander and so often I am with you and imagine what you are doing right now. - Today there is a little change for us again. A little vaudeville evening with a performance of a theater play. It won't be much, but you will laugh once again. Then there will be six working days again. We are only allowed 24 hours of rest during the week. On 30. May 1945 there was a big holiday here - "Memorial day" - but not for us, we were allowed to work on "our" field. But we are prisoners, and we are often made to understand this by the foremen in the factories. But we have become stubborn and know how to defend ourselves. That's it, the bell calls for lunch. I wonder if there will be meat again today.

10. June 1945

There was no meat the last Sunday, as well as today, but sausages with sauerkraut, well I also became full from it. - In the evening of the last Sunday we had a very nice vaudeville evening. Our band played old tunes, among others: "Like a miracle came the love ...", yes it was nice times and nice hours, which we have spent in Schwedt/Oder². Will there be nice times for us again? - Our choir also made a good effort with good, old, German folk songs, which one always likes to hear. Then there was our theater group, which presented two short plays. In short, it was a homely hour and happy laughter resounded through the room. I could almost be completely satisfied if only I knew how you, my dear ones, are doing.

This week brought us a bit of warmth, heat, summer for which I now actually long. Oh could we give each other warmth again and be happy and contented. I wonder if we can be once again. The big conference is still deliberating about the occupation of Germany. (--- censored---)

The last week brought us another change. Our command was borrowed for a few days. We were allowed to work in a fertilizer factory. In the evening we always looked like the flour-men. We were lucky to be able to take a warm shower every day, so that we could always wash down the dust and be clean again in the evening. - "Smoking tickets" were given to us a few days ago. Cigarettes, which are also scarce for the civilian population, have not been available to us for months. But there was enough pipe tobacco and cigarette tobacco. In the last few weeks, however, we only got one kind of tobacco, which is now still rationed and there are two packets a week. In addition, we have been cut \$3 a month. These \$3 now get only the "P.W." who do not work at all in a month. Since almost everyone here in the camp works every day, there is no lack of money. I can't spend all the money I earned, because apart from toiletries there is not much to buy in the canteen. A nice wallet, or better money (---censored---) leather I bought yesterday and a (---censored---)

Sundays are always the day when I share with you and tell you my dear my little incidents of the week. My thoughts then stay with you and it is for me, as if you were actually with me. Unfortunately, I always miss your answer and your daily small or big experiences. My greatest wish, stay healthy!

17 June 1945

Another week is over and again I have my chat hour. We got the longed-for summer this week. It's almost too hot, because working outdoors makes you sweat profusely. I have lost some weight again. But it is still normal weight. - Our camp looks pretty good now. The lawns are nice and green and our flowers will be blooming soon too. Our peas, onions and radishes have grown quite nicely. Our camp is directly a paradigm camp, because all the time there are visitors. It would be quite comfortable if we had a

² Schwedt / Oder – city where my grandparents met and lived

little more freedom. Since our camp is located directly at Lake Ontario, we had the first opportunity to swim yesterday. It was still quite cool, but once again it was something different. - Every week they show us an American sound film and tonight they showed us the film "K.Z-Lager Buchenwald" followed by an entertainment movie. From the pictures we have seen in magazines of the Buchenwald camp, terrible conditions must have prevailed in these camps. - Our motto is now "going home". Many rumors are constantly floating around our camp. "Six hundred men from one camp are to be released, of whom allegedly four hundred refused!" "So and so many prisoners are to be handed over to England, France or Russia!" "On the other hand, prisoners who have already been released to Germany (but not yet from America) have been given a warm welcome by the German side." The uncertainty is terrible. How will I see you again, my dear ones, where do you live, are you still alive, is there already a regular life for you, what is the occupation force like, etc.? Will I get back my job? These are all questions that keep us busy the whole time, and the rumors that come out of them are so numerous that no one knows anything for sure. I only hope that we will meet again in good health and that everything will be fine.

Now it is almost a year that I came into captivity and almost 1 ½ years ago that I have not seen you, my darlings. Do you still love me, do you think about me and is my girl also faithful? Well, I think I need to worry about that the least, because you will certainly not do that to me. I think you have other worries, too. If only I could take those worries away from you soon. When will our trip home come, still this year? Hopefully, however, the first mail from you will come soon.

24. June 1945

Sunday - "A wonderful summer day". I have just taken a cool outdoor bath and then lain in the beautiful sun for an hour. Now I wish for a nice cup of coffee and strawberry cake and then of course to be with you, my dear ones. But, but it is only a wish that no one fulfills me. One certainly always worries and thinks, perhaps too much and in vain, who knows.

Today in the camp there was again a big form filling. Member of the party? Years ago my advancement, indeed my position at all, failed because I was not a Nazi. (--- Censored---) I started again from the beginning in 1935 and fought my way back into a position after being unemployed from 1933 to mid-1934. I was able to start a family and was able to be happy for a few years. The war destroyed everything. My position is also gone again and at the age of 40 I will now, for the third time, start all over again. All is well that ends well. I hope that I will also be happy again.

The first step for the journey home is done. So work is being done in higher places. Hopefully they won't make us wait too long.

The food has gotten even worse. We are given potatoes only 2-3 days a week, and bread is rationed. We don't get fresh meat anymore, only sausages or liver. Why is there all of a sudden this severe cutback?

The work goes on and the longing to come home is growing. Once this day must come as well, and therefore away with all stupid thoughts, it comes as it must come and I can not change anything about it. Who knows, for what everything is good (---censored---) work out somehow and healthy I want to remain for you.

1 July 1945

Today it is a wonderful summer day again and one does not know what to do with it. One loiters around and does not know what to start. No one is allowed to go out for sports today, and we are not allowed to go swimming either. Why not? In the heat of the last few days, some comrades went to work at the field, bare-chested. This is strictly forbidden for us, we are even not allowed to work in our sport shirts (without sleeves). Even in the camp we are not allowed to walk around bare-chested, even if it is only from the barracks to the washroom, about 40m.

I have just written another postcard to you my dear. Only short lines, but I would be happy to receive such a short greeting from you, and you won't feel any different. If only the mail traffic would be working again. How is it with you, how do you live? These are always my thoughts.

On July 4, I will have been a prisoner for a year now, and I can say today that the time has passed quickly. The remaining weeks and months will probably also pass, because we are all supposed to be released by Christmas. Well, let's hope for the best. Otherwise nothing new is happening here.

Yesterday evening there was again a film "Why we fight" and Wochenschau, which again brought pictures from German K.Z. camps. There are also pictures from German cities, where it looks partly desolate.

There is nothing new at the workplace either. The bottles with apple juice are labeled and the rest is cleaned up and rebuilt for the processing of tomatoes. Now that strawberries and cherries are ripening, I wish I could work on a farm. Unfortunately, there are no farm commands in our camp at the moment. With the current food in the camp, some supplementary food in the form of fresh fruit would be very nice. The food is supposed to get better again. Let us hope for the best.

8. July 1945

We have not received any letter paper or blank postcards since April. Because I had a small supply of them, I still wrote a card every fourteen days. But I doubt whether they will get through. You will be waiting as eagerly for a sign of life as I am. Hopefully the

mail traffic will get back in order soon. Again and again I think about how you are doing, do you still have your apartment and now peace and quiet? What does the future hold for us? What awaits us after our return to Germany? No one knows and maybe that is a good thing. I only hope that I will meet you in good health and that everything else will work out somehow.

Here we have the most wonderful summer. We are allowed to swim in Lake Ontario about two or three times a week, which is a great advantage for us compared to other camps. We are told that our camp is one of the most beautiful camps. - I was able to put 25\$ dollars back into my savings account, hopefully I will get some of this money one day. - On the occasion of a collection by the Red Cross for the victims of the concentration camps, the amount of \$1055.57 was collected here in the camp. A very considerable amount. An acknowledgement from the camp commander was not lacking. - On Wednesday I saw the first German movie here in the camp, "Deutschland amüsiert sich", an old movie, but it was once again something from home. Yesterday there was another American film, and so there are two or three films every week, which always brings some variety. This afternoon I want to go out to the soccer field again. The field is about 15 minutes away from the camp. That will be my Sunday again, and in the meantime I'll be learning American, I wonder if I'll ever use it?

Now, when I finish my toilet on Sunday morning and have breakfast (today: two slices of bread, margarine, syrup, a piece of cake, coffee), I immediately feel the need to share with you my dear. I hope one time you will be able to read these lines, which have already become a small book.

I sit on my bed, a board on my knees, and put my worries and thoughts on paper. - But right "peasant" louts can be found among the "dear" comrades. One is the other's fiend and there is little sign of decency. When you have lived together for nine months, as we have now, you get to know each and every one of them. They are almost all between twenty and twenty-five and basically haven't experienced much yet. I sometimes feel quite old and envy the others. Despite my gray hair, however, I feel young and am young with the young. But there are also many nice and beautiful hours that I will be able to remember later. One year is already behind me and I hope that it will not take so long. Will you and I also experience nice days once again? Now you also have a nice Sunday and in my thoughts I am always with you, my dear. Stay healthy and protect my dear little girl. How often, when I have such a little American girl in front of me, I have to think of my little blond curly head. When I see her again, it will be a big girl and then I will feel really old. But we will still both be young, don't you think?

15 July 1945

Raindrops knocking on my window....., it has been like this since yesterday afternoon. My "big" laundry, which has been hanging outside since yesterday, will probably not dry today. It has been raining profusely for the past week. There was a thunderstorm

almost every day. We were not allowed to bath during the week. - Yesterday I bought a beautiful, leather-bound diary – "One year diary". Hopefully we can take everything with us to Germany. It is only small things that we can buy here, just souvenirs. Otherwise there is nothing to tell today. The weeks go by like nothing and the summer will soon be over again. Will we be together for Christmas? It would be nice.

22. July 1945

The rain pelts down, the thunder rolls and lightning flashes in the sky. It is Sunday. Half asleep, we doze off. It is still quiet in the barracks, outside my window our dog whines, a small black long-haired animal; six puppies have arrived overnight, as we found out later. The Sunday silence is suddenly interrupted by the shrill whistle of the U.v.D. "Get up"! The day begins. Slowly we rise from our bed. Today is a day of rest, you can take your time. It's still raining cats and dogs; we walk to the wash barracks to shake off the last of our fatigue. One is directly grown with the camp, it is our "home". Everything is going well and we could be carefree if, yes, if we knew how things were with you. - The bell calls for breakfast. The work clothes are hung aside and I get dressed for Sunday, I walk leisurely to the dining room. The tables are set, always for ten men. For a change, today there are corn flakes with milk, plus bread, margarine, syrup and cake. Now the whole Sunday lies before me... I read, learn English vocabulary, go a bit in the fresh air and wait for lunch, because since we get no meat at all, I'm always hungry. In the past there was always poultry on Sundays and today fish. One still gets full, but it could be better. After the meal, of course, we sleep. At 2 o'clock we go to the lake for swimming and soccer and in the evening one is glad that the boring Sunday is over. In the evening we had a nice music evening.

29. July 1945

Yesterday I weighed myself again, 148 lb (engl.), in the Winter it was still 160 lb. Nevertheless, I feel well.

The big conference has discussed the fate of Germany at Potsdam. Poland will extend to the Oder. Will grandma and grandpa and Irmi be able to return once again to Königsberg and Lüstrin? If only I could hear something from you. I myself have not been able to write for several weeks.

Bathing and soccer are forbidden until further notice, why? Because the haircut is not according to regulations (2 ¼ inches) and so there are "pleasant" surprises for us almost every day. If only the journey home would come soon for us.

5. August 1945

The first "P.W." have started their journey home to Germany, as reported a few days ago in the "New York Times". It was probably mainly wounded men who were transported on a hospital ship, as could be seen from the pictures. If only this day would

come soon for me, too. I don't know what awaits me in Germany, but one thing I will achieve again is to be together with you, my dear ones. Everything else will find its way somehow, it will be alright. The uncertainty in which I and all the other comrades live here is terrible. All the areas beyond the Oder are being evacuated and how many comrades from here are from these areas.

In the barracks there is a wonderful silence this afternoon. Our sportsmen with their supporters went out to play soccer. The silence is a relief. Once again I am in the right mood to pursue my own thoughts. But as often as I have time, they wander to you, my dear. What are you doing now? "How are you" the American asks, but there is no answer. I have to force myself sometimes to get rid of the dull thoughts. I throw myself into books and magazines, or I sleep.

Next week is now my birthday. I will be 40 years old. Sometimes I cannot believe it. The years have just passed with all the worries quite quickly. One wished for a carefree life and this war has now overturned everything again. The ray of hope that appeared for us in the sky has disappeared and everything is dark. But despite all the darkness, I have not yet given up hope that I can live happy years with you. Is it possible to be "young" even at the age of forty? Hopefully I can show it to you.

We got the first peaches yesterday and today. Many commandos are now going back to the farms to pick fruit. Strawberries and cherries that are now being processed in the factories taste great. Unfortunately, there is no such thing at our command. We load the "Apple Juice" daily and prepare the factory for processing tomatoes. In a few weeks it will start and then there will be apples again. But we get samples of all things through comrades. One brings this and the other that and you can always eat. Last week I got a bowl full of sweetened, crushed strawberries from a buddy every evening, and they tasted great. Food is the main topic with us now. When we arrived in America a year ago we were famished and when we ate in our kitchen we went to the other company's kitchen. But that soon stopped, then we were full. There was too much food. How much ham, bacon, sausage and eggs did we leave on our plates, because we were overfed. It was the same in the local camp. If you were still hungry in the evening, you went to the kitchen and got a slice or a piece of cake. Often we skipped a meal, mainly the one on Sunday morning. And today? After every meal the tables and plates are empty. We get almost no meat at all, only in soups. Preserved fruits and ice cream, as well as ham, are also no longer available. Our cake of the morning has not yet been taken from us. Yes, that's how times change. The civilian population in the small towns here gets next to poultry but also almost no meat.

Our lunch: soup with rice and bacon, pasta with pieces of sausage, fresh pods and carrots and salad from our garden, two slices of bread, coffee and a peach.

I'm sure you'll say plenty! But we are spoiled and expect two eggs, or bacon in the morning and a decent piece of meat, hearty gravy and potatoes in the evening.

But how often I have to think about what you have to eat. If only everything would soon be in order again, I could be with you again and be allowed to work for you, my yokes. Together we want to carry our worries and still be happy and content. No quarrels or anger should spoil our day and we want to live for our little daughter, understanding each other, yes? If only there were some more dear lines from you.

12. August 1945

A small "forget-me-not" from our garden. Will you forget me? I don't think so. It is blooming beautifully in our camp now. We have the most beautiful summertime now. I also happily survived my second birthday as "P.W.". Last year on the "George Washington" it went by without a noise. We were all strangers to each other, no one really knew the other. This year it was something else. When I woke up in the morning, there was a beautifully prepared birthday table in front of my bed. A beautiful bouquet of flowers, in front of it a plate with cake and then many things that we can buy here in the canteen. They were:

four writing pads, two pencils, four packets of tobacco, two tubes of toothpaste, four bottles of face lotion, two tubes of shaving cream, three cans of face cream, two bottles of liquid shampoo, two cans of powder, two bottles of hair lotion, one bottle of liquid shaving cream, two cans of shoe polish, two cigarette holders, one ashtray, six bars of soap

That should have been about all of it. I won't need to buy any toiletries for the next half year. In the evening I got a small basket of sugared strawberries from a buddy, and you can imagine that they were delicious. Otherwise we had a very nice movie "The clock" in the evening, so I could be satisfied with this day if there would have been a greeting from you, but unfortunately. Since July I have not written myself, because for the time being there is no mail from us to Germany.

Now it takes a few more weeks and then the tomato season begins here. By the way, the tomato juice produced in "our" factory, filled in cans, tastes excellent. There are still some cartons of cans left over from last year, which we are gradually drinking up. We "earn" about thirty dollars a week. But we only get paid eighty cents a day, and so far I have been able to save forty-eight dollars, which I hope to take home with me one day. From the rest of the "earnings" we will hardly see anything, because for this we get our food, our clothes, etc. The whole camps are maintained by these "earnings".

Again I have told you my weekly experiences and what are yours? Again and again I wish you good health and that we will meet again soon. The war with Japan is now also coming to an end and perhaps this will favor our whole situation and also our journey home. The day will come when we will be reunited again.

19. August 1945

Again and again I think about what awaits us in our homeland when we go home. Maybe I'm thinking useless thoughts, but it won't look rosy. If only I would hear something from you. But the most fantastic rumors are buzzing around the camp. Most of us belong to those whose territory is occupied by the Russians. Does life still have any purpose at all?

On Thursday 16. August 1945 the first miner - a miner from Upper Silesia - left the camp to start his journey home. When is my turn?

Last Sunday -12. August 1945 - the radio announced in the evening that the war with Japan was over. All the sirens were wailing and there was a terrible noise around here. After ten minutes this unofficial announcement was revoked and all noise ceased. On Tuesday evening -14. August 1945 it was finally over. The war is over, it was said, and now we could celebrate. Two days we also had "holiday", we did not go to work. Perhaps the sudden end of the world war will also bring us a small advantage, be it better food, better supply of tobacco or an earlier trip home, because a lot of ship space is now free.

We still have the most marvelous weather. Even if one day it is very chilly, the next day is wonderful again. Almost every day we can swim in Lake Ontario in the evening and I make good use of it. Unfortunately, I have not been able to swim since Friday, because I suffered a head injury that day while working at the factory. I walk around with a thick plaster. But it is healing well and in the next few days it will probably be okay again. These are once again the events of the week. Behind it is the longing for freedom. It must be wonderful to be free again, but will we ever be free again?

26 August 1945

In contrast to the previous Sunday, today we have quite ugly weather. It is stormy and raining and it is actually cold. My "big" laundry that I hung up yesterday was lying dirty on the ground this morning, so I had to wash it again. It is sometimes quite boring on Sundays.

In "our factory" they have finished setting up the machines and next week they will start processing tomatoes. Tomato juice in cans. The one from last year tastes great. We got the first pears for supper yesterday. Do you have any?

There is an awful lot of talk about the trip home. One group is talking about going home before Christmas, the other is counting on going home next spring. We can probably take fifty-five pounds and ten pounds of books with us. As for clothing, I have quite a lot: underwear, two good pairs of pants, two sport shirts, two work suits and, above all, a good winter coat. All things that I would not want to miss, because who knows what I still have "at home". - Yes, if only it was time that we could pack our things.

In the barracks it is exceptionally quiet this morning. After breakfast - corn flakes with milk, bread, nut butter, syrup, two pancakes, coffee - most have gone back to sleep. Some are reading, studying or writing, and singing with harmonium accompaniment to the Catholic service resounds from the canteen. Soon it is noon again. What's on the menu today? I would have liked a nice roast pork again, but alas. Well, maybe it will come again. We've always had enough so far. - What are you doing today? If only I knew if you were all healthy....

A year ago today, I was already in America for a few days. I was surprised. We were housed in clean barracks, given good laundry and clothing, and fed well. I had not imagined it like this. Thanks to the new impressions, the jobs, etc., the year passed quickly. The last time will also pass and then I will see you again.

3 September 1945

Command 5 does not go to work today. A rare event and therefore all the more gratifying for us. Because today is Labor Day. However, this day is only partially celebrated. Tomorrow, we too will be back at work. Tomato juice! These things I have for the next few weeks again in abundance. At lunchtime with bread they taste very good. We are now working full time again for six days, the beautiful Saturday afternoons are over. One could wash on these afternoons so nicely laundry etc.

Weight on 30.8. - 151 lb

Last week another comrade left us to go home. So the aforementioned foreigners will be sent home first.

Yesterday was my sister's birthday, and my thoughts were again with you all day. When you look at the newspapers and magazines and see pictures from your homeland, you are not in a happy mood at all. What does the future bring, that are again and again my worries, but "Keep your chin up" the American say and so it should be. There is no point in moping around. Fortunately, work or a good movie like last night's "Hollywood canteen" can take our minds off things.

(--- Censored ---)

If I can only find you in good health, then I will be satisfied.

9 September 1945

Another week has passed and it brought nothing good. Soon our camp will be dissolved and where will we go? I keep telling myself not to look too blackly into the future, but again and again new reports come in which remind us that we are real slaves after all. The last quite official report in the "New York Times" in the last week

brought us again the right mood. Of the approximately 350,000 prisoners here in America, 15,000 are to be delivered to Belgium, 15,000 to Holland, and the rest to France for reconstruction. Three years are planned for this. One must not even think about it, because it is terrible that they want to deprive us of our homeland for three more years. Don't the many dead of the war have it better? They don't know anything anymore and we don't know what awaits us. I will be an old man when I see my homeland again. I must not think of you at all. You can perhaps imagine how we feel here. (---censored---)

Dear lines I received yesterday from you. The letter from 21.11.44, which was ten months on the way. If only I now get news from you, which tell me how you are, because what can have happened in these ten months. Nevertheless, I do not want to forget our saying "it will be all right somehow". Everything will be good for something and I hope for a healthy reunion with you soon.

16 September 1945

It is quite a cold day today. Until a few days ago we still bathed in Lake Ontario, now it is over, the summer is over. At the same time quite gloomy thoughts come to me again. How will you fare this winter? Last year I knew that you had a cellar full of coal, but how is it this year?

On Sept. 12, 1945 we were married for nine years. What lies all in these years. We got to know each other with our weaknesses (---censored---) ... that I can be with you again quite soon and still live happy years with you and my little daughter. But this thought is for the time being still in the far distance.



A small discussion with you and these lines, which I write down here weekly, in the hope that I can put them into your hands, my dear, once. I could write much more, but basically one day is like the other. The worries remain and the mood changes according to the slogans that circulate here in the camp.

Despite the fact that some days we have to work very hard, I am satisfied with my state of health. The food always tastes good, even if it is "rice, spinach and scrambled eggs". I have pretty much maintained my weight and otherwise I look pretty good. My ear has cleared up on its own. Lately I have been tearing in my left leg up to my hip apparently due to the draft on the truck. With horror I think of the winter and the cold rides. In the last few days I have been massaged and rubbed (camp paramedic) and I think it will get better. My eyes are also worse. Without glasses I can read only with great effort and I am glad that I saved my glasses.

Last week I picked tomatoes for the first time in America. In huge fields the tomato plants lie on the ground because with this abundance they are of course not tied high like in grandpa's garden. In any case, it is not a nice job to crawl around in a stooped position in the field all day. Fortunately it was only for one day. From a German farmer who has his farm nearby and who knew us from the factory, we received a bottle of beer and a pack of cigarettes (20 pieces) for lunch. In the factory, still at Jaybee's, the tomatoes are rolling. More than a thousand crates are processed daily, which makes about thirty thousand small cans. In any case, work is in abundance.

While we had an orange every day so far, there are now mostly also pears, plums or peaches. Today is my father's birthday, he is sixty-eight years old today. Is he and also my mother still healthy and lively? If only I could see all my loved ones again in good health and hopefully quite soon.

23 September 1945

Sunday morning! The weekly in-depth body care is over again. I have showered, which by the way we can do daily, washed with good toilet soap, which is available to us in abundance, and massaged my head with liquid shampoo. Now in fresh laundry, shaved, in the hair some hair tonic and good toilet water in the face, the feet powdered and one is again ready for the "Sunday walk". But the Sunday walk is only from the wash barracks to the living barracks or to the dining room. For the rest, you lie around and read, and so you doze off the Sunday you've been looking forward to all week. We have heated today and it is therefore quite cozy and bearable.

The specter that we will be in France for years to come has not yet disappeared. It's terrible, you can't even think about it.

It's going round at the factory now, as we say here. We're swimming in tomatoes again and it's going quick. Whether we will then process apples again, as we did last year, is still questionable, because there are few apples in this area. Hopefully,

another kind of fruit will come, because then you can always eat proficiently. We must have brought several hundredweights of apples to the camp over the course of the months. Others brought plums or pears. At the moment we have a lot of peaches, which are processed during a command.

I keep thinking about what kind of fruit you have. I could do without so much here if I could give it to you. We are never without fruit on a day. But again and again the thoughts stop. I don't know anything about you, and I can't imagine how it is now. I can only hope that you will survive everything well and that we will meet again soon in good health.

30 September 1945

On Sept. 25 I have been in the Sodus Point subcamp for a year now. I like it here quite well. If one might have more variety in a larger camp, I am quite satisfied that we have not changed so often. We have to work in every camp and it doesn't matter where we are. The week was again quite uneventful. On Friday we had a very nice American movie again. One can follow now already quite nicely and it is therefore always a quite nice entertainment hour.

Here it is now becoming autumn with power. The trees are slowly becoming bare again and on some days it's quite unpleasant outdoors. When I think about it, I have to say that the year has actually passed quickly. Not so long ago, you stashed your winter clothes in your duffel bag and now it's time to take them out again. In a quarter of a year it will be Christmas and I am afraid that we will spend this year's "Christmas feast" again in this camp, or at least behind barbed wire. The longing to finally come home is getting bigger and bigger. When you are with civilians every day and see their quiet life, you can become envious. But nothing helps, we just have to hold out.

7 October 1945

A new work I have become acquainted with this week - celery! On October 3, exactly after one year, it was suddenly over at Jaybee's. The tomato season is over and there are no apples here this year. The place was therefore closed. With twenty men we went on a farm command on October 4. Picking celery. Big long fields of celery. Using an apparatus, the roots of the celery are cut off row by row. Our job now is to peel off the individual plants and place them in rows on the ground. Others pack the plants into crates and these then go into the cold store. After the long factory work, this is now a new job that I quite like. Even though it's still a bit chilly in the morning, you're out in the fresh air all day and my appetite is even bigger in the evening. After all, the work won't last long.

Our "The Call"³ wrote the other day that the mail traffic, even for us, is slowly getting going again. Hopefully I will get a sign of life from you soon.

14 October 1945

Today's Sunday lunch - broth soup with noodles, potatoes, now again plenty from our own field, a slice of sausage roasted, white cabbage sour and sweet, rutabaga vegetables, applesauce, two slices of bread and coffee . I have had again. I am full again and that is the main thing. Now I am sitting in the warm barracks again and my thoughts are with you again. Do you also have a warm room and have eaten your fill for lunch? Now, in October, I have to think again of the wonderful time in Schwedt/Oder. 1935 ! What has happened in these years since then...

During the last week it was quite cold and wet. It was sometimes quite unpleasant on the field. But we will probably have to endure one more week and then what will happen? We have been working with a troop of black people this week. The boss (foreman) constantly smokes on a cigar. When he lit another one a few days ago, I asked him in English where my cigar was. He just laughed and said he didn't have any left. Yesterday morning the foreman came to the field later. When he saw me, he held out a cigar to me from a distance, which I received with a beaming smile. At the moment I like to smoke a cigar very much. After work we each got a cigar from our farmer as well.

On Friday, another man was released to Germany. He lives in Berlin. Maybe he has the opportunity to send you greetings from me. We have now some new posts who stood at fronts in Germany and tell us a lot. If only I could come home soon too. Soon it will be two years that I have not seen you.

28 October 1945

During the last week I really did not feel like writing anything down. After all, it is one day like the other. The news in the newspapers that we are being sent to France always seems terrible. When will I be coming home again? In fact, one has already become quite jaded. During the day we go to work and in the evening we doze around or sleep. It's not nice anymore. The farm work is over again. I am with now 16 men at Burns in Alton N.Y. . Beet and carrots are being processed at the moment. The food is a little more plentiful again. There is some meat again. Tonight there was: bread, lard, margarine, potato salad, cucumber, ½ egg, 2 slices of sausage, cheese, 1 apple and tea.

Tonight we had a slide lecture. The National Parks of America and the making of a newspaper. A small change in the eternal monotony - If only I would hear from you

³ „Der Ruf“ – German newspaper published by German POW in Fort Kearny

again soon. Since the beginning of Feb. - quite nine months - I have had no news and I am sure it is the same with you. Will we ever get a quiet life again?

4 November 1945

The year 1945 will be over soon and there is the prospect that we will still spend this winter at Camp Sodus Point. If we don't get home after all, then I would rather stay in this camp. We can't really complain. We get food and drink, we have our clothes and our accommodation in warm barracks. You, my dear ones, are not doing so well and that is my biggest worry. Hopefully you will get over this time and I will see you again in good health.

Winter is slowly coming here. The trees are bare and the last harvest, celery, cabbage and beet is under cover. Work continues at the factory. Beet into pieces. Slices and cubes roll and large and small tins fill up and are stacked in the big warehouse or packed and loaded into wagons. Yesterday, Saturday, our plant did not work for once and we had a day off, which is always pleasant for us. Our slogan is as little work as possible. I wonder if we will ever see any of the money we have earned.

11 November 1945

Another week has gone by and I am again sitting on the edge of my bed on Sunday morning. What should I write? To imagine about the conditions in Germany and what it looks like in your country? One doesn't know anything here and one can't get a real picture from the newspaper reports. Should I write about our camp life, about work, about food and drink? It is always the same. I hear nothing from you, and basically nothing happens here. No one knows when we're going home, whether we'll get to France, etc. It's all dark. While some time ago it was said that we would stay in this camp for the winter, now there are already other slogans. Our main camp Niagara is to be dissolved and tomorrow it is to be decided whether we still remain here or go on a journey. For us only one thing is important, home, and that quite soon. The uncertainty is something terrible and again and again my thoughts are with you.

- To be continued -