

Diary of Walter Meyer

Translated by Andreas Suchi

Part 4

22. Nov. 1945

Thanksgiving Day. A holiday in America. Tradition on this day is turkey, as we eat roast goose at Christmas. Anyway, we are not at work and that is the most important thing for us. Today the wetaher is quite ugly again. It has been raining since the early morning and so is our mood. A few days ago some comrades left quite suddenly. Are they going home or to France? Nobody knows. It can happen to all of us. One day we will have to pack our seabags! Our camp will probably not be dissolved for the time being. We merely belong to another main camp now. How long will this stubborn camp life last? Working, eating, sleeping, that is the daily routine. You don't really feel like doing anything. It is best to work, although a holiday or a day of rest would be nice. The best thing would be to come home, but who knows.

Nov 25 is my mother's birthday, she will be sixty-six years old, is she still spry? I wish her all the best and hope to see her again soon in good health. The hope that we will see our loved ones back home in good health is what keeps us going.

Nov. 25, 1945

Birthday! Years ago, one wished that on such days all family members would be together and celebrate these days together. But all were never together. One lived there and the other there and it was usually not possible to get everyone together on one day. The war tore everything apart even more. Far from home, I can now think of you, my loved ones, and wish you, dear mother, all the best for your birthday today. I only hope that the hour will soon strike for me to be reunited with you.

Dec. 2, 1945

First Advent! Of course we have an Advent wreath in the barracks again this year. But there is no mood for anything, and so these Sundays before Christmas pass by like any other Sunday. We sit here warmly in our barrack and you? Since a few days we have the real winter again. It snowed again and we didn't work on Friday and Saturday.

Dec. 25, 1945 - Christmas

Merry Christmas! Can one speak of a merry Christmas this year? How beautiful it was in earlier years, especially the time before Christmas. The anticipation of the feast was always the most beautiful thing. Mysterious preparations were made to bring joy to loved ones. On Christmas Day, when the goose was stewing in the pan and the smells

were wafting through the apartment, it was nice to be with your loved ones in a warm room. Outside it was a wonderful winter weather, the snow crunched under your feet and when you came home with red cheeks, the roast goose tasted even better. Gone! The war has torn everything apart. In the far distance I sit here today and remember the beautiful time. I can well imagine your Christmas this year and my heart aches when I think of it. Again and again my gaze wanders into the distance over Lake Ontario and my thoughts are with you. I sit with you in the "warm room", do you still have one, are you healthy? and we talk about beautiful days. In spite of everything, I don't want to lose hope that we will meet again in good health and that we will be able to have a merry Christmas again.

Merry Christmas!



Our mood in the camp was also anything but Christmas-like. However, comrades were found who made preparations for Christmas for the company. Yesterday we decorated our barracks and a small Christmas tree was also on hand. As in the previous year, our Christmas party was held after dinner in the decorated dining room. Who would have thought last year that we would celebrate this year's Christmas in the same camp - Sodus Point. White-covered tables with burning lights lit up as we entered the dining room. A few Christmas carols from our singing club introduced the short devotional celebration held in memory of our loved ones back home. Then we sang a few Christmas carols together, and by the lighted tree we stayed together for some time with coffee and cake. With our colorful plates, which were again abundantly filled, despite the fact that we had not had canteen goods for several weeks, we moved to

our barracks, with our thoughts with you in the homeland. Today is a holiday, and after four days of celebrating, we'll be back at work again tomorrow, as we approach the end of the year. I do not want to bury the hope that we will finally meet again in good health in the new year. For us, too, happy days will come again and therefore a happy New Year!

December 31, 1945

An ugly, gloomy winter day. It is raining, that is the end of the year 1945.

To you, my dear, I wish all the best on this day. Stay healthy now, my little daughter, and so I will close the year with the hope that the year 1946 will bring me freedom and thus a reunion with you.

24. XII. 1945

Morning: bread, nut butter, lard, cake, coffee.

Lunchtime: soup, potatoes, fish goulash, rutabagas, semolina pudding, bread, coffee.

Evening: bread, sausage (3 kinds), cheese, fat, semolina pudding, coffee

Christmas Party: coffee, three pieces of cake

Colorful plate: gingerbread, cookies, apple, orange, nuts, candy, chocolates, cigarettes

25 XII 1945

Morning: bread, jam, syrup, cake, coffee

Lunchtime: broth (poultry), potatoes, fricassee of turkey, carrots, white cabbage, bread, coffee, apple sauce

Evening: bread, sausage, coffee, pudding

Jan. 6, 1946

The "holidays" are over and I say thank God. Even if the days of rest (Christmas four, New Year three) are quite pleasant, there was no real "celebration". Our thoughts are always with you. Let us only hope that the year 1946 will bring me freedom and that we will soon meet again in good health. In 1933 I was torn from my position by the Nazis. Now that the Nazi regiment has been eliminated, I hope that I, too, will be able to work again and accomplish something in my profession without just being tolerated. I shudder to think, when we are shown pictures of the K.Z. camps here, that I too could have lived there, like so many of my former party comrades before 1933. But this chalice passed me by. Hopefully we can soon work for a peace-loving, democratic Germany.

13 Jan 1946

One week of no work in our factory where I now work. A week of rest, wonderful days, but they pass again and then there's beet again and more beet, thousands of cans a day.

The weather this year is also quite strange. One day rain, then snow again, today the most beautiful spring weather and tomorrow another icy snowstorm. But it's spring again, the days are getting longer again and reports that our camp is to be disbanded are buzzing around the camp again. Is it time to go home? I hope that I can be with you again in the spring.

Jan. 20, 1946

Ice and snow brought us the last few days and snow was shoveled diligently the last few days. Last night we had such an icy storm that we thought our barracks would be carried away. We have had some nice American movies in the last few weeks, our only change in the eternal camp monotony. For the rest, there is a travel fever in the whole camp, because we are going home and hopefully soon. If only I had news from you. Letters have already come through again from time to time.

Jan. 27, 1946

Another week has passed. Saturday was a day off for us from Commando 1. How it will be next week is not yet known. Probably we, too, will no longer go to work, like most of my comrades in the camp. On Friday we got cigarettes again since a long time, and hopefully that will continue.

Yesterday we got different pants and shirts again. The greenish pants and shirts - American army clothing - were turned in and in exchange we received everything in black, including coats.

Incidentally, the last week brought more ice and snow. Today it is again quite cold.

What will the next weeks bring?

6 Feb 1946

Lunchtime! There is a wonderful quiet in the camp and also in the barracks. The stove crackles softly and there is a comforting warmth, while outside the storm howls and swirls the snow. My thoughts wander off into the distance again. When will the day come when we leave the orderly camp life and are free again and can work for our own living once more. It is hard to get used to the idea that we will have to leave everything here and yet our greatest longing is that soon the day will come that will bring us home to our loved ones.

I have not been working since Jan. 26. The command has come to an end. Except for the short work each day in camp, we have rest. I have put all my things in order and the rest is lazing around. I wish that I too can soon return to work and entertain you my dear ones again. May all hatred be eliminated and peace reign in the world, and it should be my task to contribute to this and to be able to lead a happy family life again.

17 Feb. 1946

If we thought that we would leave this camp at the beginning of February, we were very much mistaken. We are staying for the time being, how long? Nobody knows. I have been lazing around for three weeks, and since two days I have been working again in a cannery (Southland in Ontario, N.Y.). So it is again nothing with the journey home and again it means we have to wait. It will soon be spring again, then summer and in my mind I can see myself spending another Christmas behind barbed wire. On February 11, I received your letter of February 21, 1945. A whole year lies in between, what has happened in the meantime? I am glad that you, my dear, are together with B. more often, hopefully he could continue to be a support for you. I often have to think of him now and remember the conversations we had at the time about the general situation and the war. It mostly came true. It is a pity that I cannot be with him now. For eight days we have been able to buy one pint (0.57 liters) of milk a day for ten cents in the canteen, and how much milk can you buy?

Twenty-two men left our camp quite suddenly on Feb. 15. They were comrades from the English zone. Well, hopefully our day will come soon. My greatest wish at the moment is to receive mail from you, so that I know how you are doing. Again and again we have to wait and wait again.

March 3, 1946

In February it was now two years that I have not seen you. I left you with a heavy heart, because it was already clear to me at the time that we would not be able to stop the enemy in the West during an invasion. It came as it had to come. Now it is almost a year after the end of the war and there is still no talk of orderly conditions with you. Through the "New York newspaper and herold" in German, we learn a lot about Germany and are thus somewhat oriented. We can buy this newspaper daily in the canteen. As of April 1, postal traffic with Germany is to be reopened. Hopefully, we will receive mail and be able to write letters again. Recently we have received several letters from Germany, even from January. Hopefully I will hear from you again soon.

The last two weeks brought a lot of snow and ice and today the sun is shining again and the snow is melting. February was a really lazy month. For three days I only worked and the other comrades were not better off. But even such a time is once quite nice. Last year I had worked through the whole winter. However, the money became scarce,

so that I had to attack my "bank account". Now there are cigarettes again continuously and at present also almost daily milk to buy.

Erwin had his birthday on 23 February (30 years). What happened to him? Is he still alive, and what about Werner? Hans will be all right, I wonder if he is already home. Too bad I don't know his prisoner number.

Next week - March 8 - is my little daughter's birthday. She will be nine years old now. When I became a soldier in the spring of 1943, she was just starting school, and when will I see her again? I only wish that she is and remains healthy and that I will see you again soon, my dear ones.

Weight on Feb 18 156 lb (with overshoes).

March 24, 1946

Three weeks have passed again and I have not written down anything. What should I write? Nothing happens inside the camp and what goes on outside the camp we learn from the newspapers. But that is the only diversion we have, besides the movies we see during the week. For the last fortnight I have been working every day again, in a large mail-order company for all kinds of trees and flowers. It's something different again and you get other thoughts. Since a few weeks I have issues with my ears again. My left ear is almost completely deaf. Hopefully it will be alright again. I get daily drops in the ear and I hope it will get better.

By the way, it's getting to be spring again and it's already gorgeous in the sun. Various buddies who prune trees on farms are already pretty tanned.

Now that it's getting warmer again, it's going to get better for you guys, too. If only I would hear from you soon, or could come to you. We are supposed to work here until the end of April, and hopefully then we will be able to go home.

The food in the transit camps after April 1 was much worse.

On April 14, we once again ate beautiful Berlin pancakes as a farewell.

The present meal:

March 24, 1946 - Sunday -

Morning: bread, (plenty of) jam, syrup, 1 piece of cake, coffee.

Lunch: soup with chowder, cardboard, chopped meat, salad with sour cream, semolina pudding, bread. meat, salad with sour cream, semolina pudding, bread, coffee.

Evening: potato salad, beet, bread, 1 p. sausage, 2 p. bacon, 1 p. Tilsiter cheese, lard, jam, semolina pudding, coffee, 1 orange (additional ½ milk 10 cents).

March 25, 1946

Morning: bread, jam, syrup, coffee, milk soup.

Noon: 1 slice with sausage, cheese, jam. 2 slices with lard

Evening: bean soup, cart, spinach, 1 fried egg, beet, bread, 1 orange, coffee (1/2 l milk)

March 26, 1946

Morning: milk soup, jam. Syrup, 2 rolls, bread, coffee

Lunchtime: 1 slice of sausage, cheese, jam, 2 slices of lard.

Evening: soup, noodles with bacon sauce, carrots, semolina pudding, baked bread, coffee, 1 orange (1/2 l milk)

March 27, 1946

Morning: milk soup, bread, jam, syrup, 2 cakes, coffee.

Lunchtime: 1 slice of sausage, cheese, jam, 2 slices of lard.

Evening: soup with bacon, card, white cabbage with bacon, semolina pudding, bread, 1 orange, coffee, 1 piece of cake (1/2 l milk).

March 28, 1946

Morning: milk soup, bread, jam, syrup, 1 piece of cake, coffee.

Lunchtime: 2 slices of bread with fat, 2 jams, 1 cheese.

Evening: bean soup with bacon, noodles with tomato sauce and bacon, salad with sour cream, pudding, Jell-O, bread, 1 orange (1/2 l milk).

March 29, 1946

Morning: milk soup, bread, jam, syrup, 3 rolls, coffee.

Lunchtime: 1 slice with egg, 1 jam, 1 lard, 2 slices with cheese

Evening: noodle soup, potatoes, lung hash, salad with sour cream, bread, coffee, 1 orange (1/2 l milk)

March 30, 1946

Morning: milk soup, bread, jam, syrup, 1 piece of cake, coffee

Lunchtime: 1 slice with sausage, 2 with cheese, 2 with jam

Evening: broth soup with meat, potatoes, gravy, 1 piece of bacon, white cabbage, bread, pudding, apple sauce, coffee (1/2 l milk)

England

B.83310

May 12, 1946

Mother's Day. "If you still have a mother, thank God and be content!" Yes do I still have a mother who thinks of me, do I still have my loved ones waiting for me? Well, I am not that far away from my loved ones anymore, but still a prisoner and now in England.

For several weeks now I have not written down anything. All sorts of things have happened in these weeks and so I want to go back to them.

The camp in Sodus was supposed to be dissolved a long time ago. On April 1, I arrived from the work detail with thirty other men at about 6:00 p.m.. At the gate the camp spokesman welcomed us with the news that the "Russians" and "French" had to be ready to leave at 7 p.m.. Are we going home now? That same evening we drove three hours in the truck to Pine Camp¹, a large camp. Here there were visits, examinations, etc. We were made ready for a trip home. - On April 7 I wrote another letter to you, my dear, and a card to my parents. Our departure was delayed until April 24. In the meantime, they showed us movies upon movies, so we were not bored. On April 23, they handed us the check for our bank account. (my account 121,86\$). We were to receive this amount in Germany. The American interpreter said goodbye to us with the words: "Whether they love us or hate us, they have to let us go one day. On April 24, around 9 p.m., we left by train for Camp Shanks² near New York, where we arrived around morning. Here, thousands of PW were waiting to be shipped out and thousands were leaving the camp daily. The stay was pretty short. Already on April 27 we boarded the ship. "SS Antioch" (Victory) - 10000 BRT. was destined to take us (1400 men) to Europe. We saw the imposing skyscrapers of New York for the last time as we left the harbor. We passed the great Statue of Liberty, at the exit of the harbor, and then the Atlantic Ocean took us in. 1 ¾ year I spent in America. What had been seen? Certainly, many a beautiful city in passing. At the workplaces, one got an insight into some family relationships. All that glitters is not gold. If you want to be something, you have to work. Here, too, work and making money are the most important thing. When we arrived in America, we only saw the panorama of the big cosmopolitan city of New York at the harbor, and it was no different when we left. - There were two meals a day and we were able to move around the ship pretty freely. By Tuesday, however, I was stuck in my bunk, and I was content if I didn't have to go up. Being seasick is a miserable feeling, but for me it was still mild, because others did not come down from the toilet at all. After three days, I had gotten used to the rocking and my condition was more or less okay. Now the big question came up again, where to go. Everywhere in the camps

¹ Today Fort Drum, NY

² United States Army installation in the Orangetown, New York area

we were left in the dark, even though the preparations suggested that we would be going home. But we were not to remain in the dark about that for long. On May 5, we saw the first land in the fog in the morning and the first seagulls appeared. Toward evening we entered Liverpool (Great Britain), the same port where I embarked on Aug. 9, 1944. Off the ship onto the train we went, which took us to a camp by dawn. While in America we were driven every way, here it was different. Still in the dark we stumbled with our duffel bags (weighing about 60 lb) through an unknown area, about a $\frac{3}{4}$ hour to the 183rd camp at Quorn / Leicestershire. So we are extradited to the Englishman and how long will it go now? You can imagine my mood. In my mind I was already at home, and now? It is terrible. The first few days I was very depressed and so was everyone who came with me. About 3000 men are lying here at the moment. A week has already passed. There were again searches, examinations and interrogations. Filling out questionnaires, etc. There is also a new number - B83310 - and how long will it go on like this before we can eventually go home? When and how will I see you again, my dear ones? If only I had news from you again. A few weeks will pass, however, because we cannot write yet. We will be sent again to subcamps here and then put to work. Next week I have to go to the doctor because of my ears, I am almost deaf again on the left side. - I saw two nice German films again "When the sun shines again" and "A man of principles" and today for Mother's Day there was a nice concert.

- To be continued -